

**Community Notification #2009-12
(Issued 6/02/09)**

MONITOR LIZARDS IN BURNT STORE LAKES

Two sightings of Nile Monitor Lizards were reported over the past two weeks to the Burnt Store Lakes office. The first was a sighting of a 6-7 foot lizard walking at a fast clip (able to run 15-18 mph) down Cornflower Lane and across Cedar Rapids Road, presumably toward Pelican lake. The second sighting was of an approximate 3-4 foot lizard crossing Peppercorn Road near the intersection of Cape Horn.

Monitor lizards are generally large reptiles although some can be as small as 12 centimeters in length. They have long necks and powerful tails and claws and well developed limbs. Most species are terrestrial, but are able to climb trees, and some live in trees, others are semi-aquatic and are excellent swimmers and able to hold their breath under water for up to an hour. They lay eggs in burrows or hollow tree stumps varying from 7-80 eggs at a time.

Monitor lizards are predators that will eat anything that will fit into their mouths.

They especially like eggs; they will eat turtles, small rodents and rabbits and other mammals, birds and mollusks. They are excellent diggers and live in underground burrows, generally near water.

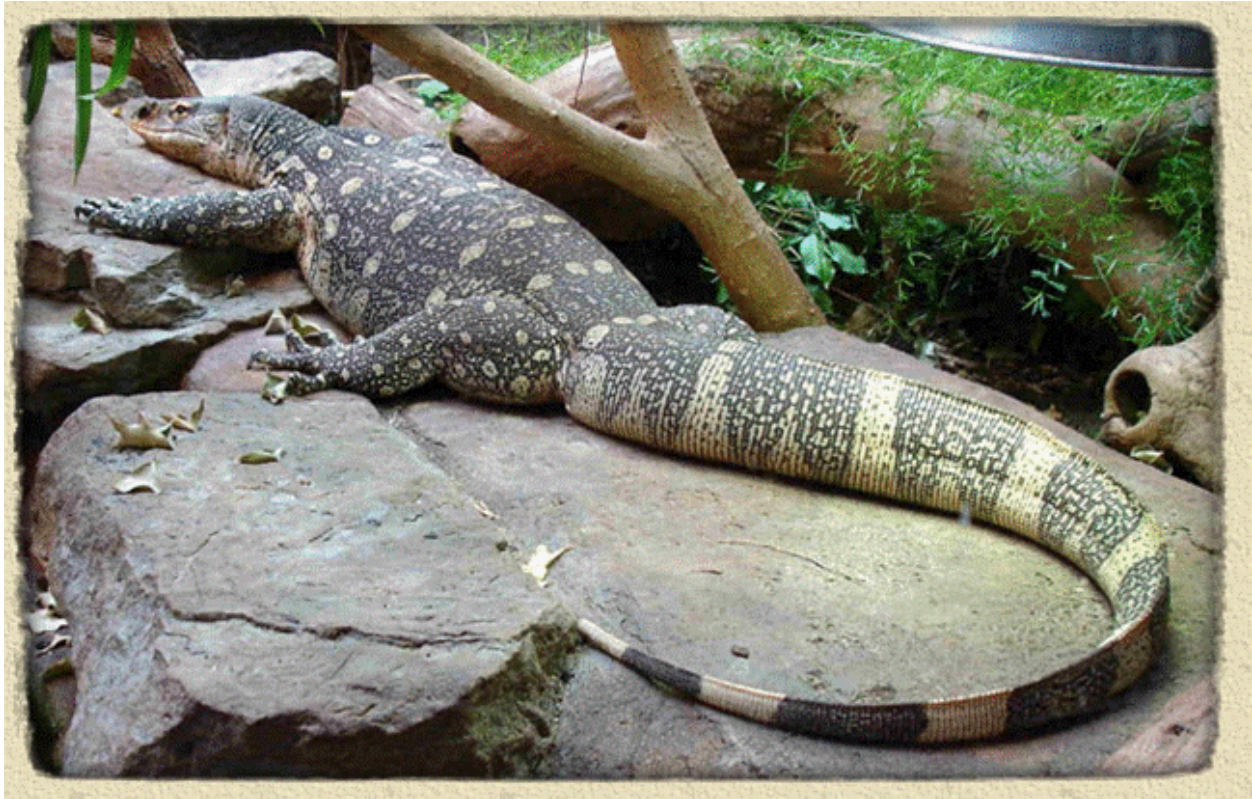
These ill-tempered lizards do not make good pets and their introduction to the area is likely due to pet owner release. The impact of this non-indigenous species to our area is great. They have no known predators (save the Nile crocodile in Africa) and are a threat to Florida's burrowing owl, American alligator and gopher tortoise. In Cape Coral, this invasive species is claimed to be responsible for the decline in the feral cat population. However, the endangered species of the area is not the only concern. If kids or adults find one trapped in a garage or manage to corner one somewhere, the lizard will hurt somebody.

Neighboring Cape Coral has a population of more than 1,000 Monitor lizards. Burnt Store Marina has recently reported sightings of these lizards as well.

Catching the lizards is no easy feat, according to a 2005 article about the eradication program in Cape Coral. Traps baited with chicken necks, squid and chum were positioned throughout the city. Even trapped lizards proved hard to manage as "they hurled themselves at the cage bars, spitting, lashing their tails and emitting a pungent spray. A city worker cornered one but fled after the creature stood up on its hind legs and hissed." Once captured and killed, the contents of the lizards' stomach were examined. No evidence of digested household pets, larger mammals – human or otherwise – has been discovered according to Biologist Todd Campbell.

The city of Cape Coral continues to provide traps for this unusual and harmful creature. Jason Thompson, a Charlotte County Biologist has been contacted by

office personnel to investigate the species in this area. Please watch for additional information as it becomes available.



The Nile monitor lizard is large; adults can grow up to 7 feet in length. Native to Africa, the Nile monitor has successfully established a new home in Florida, U.S.A.

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