

Tegu fast facts

- Tegus are native to South America.
- The tegu's diet includes fruits, vegetables, eggs, insects, cat or dog food, and small animals such as lizards and rodents.
- Like many reptiles, tegus are most active during the daytime.
- The tegu is a large species of lizard and can grow up to 4 feet in length.
- In a burrow, a tegu can survive temperatures as low as 35°F (1.6°C).
- Tegus spend the colder months of the year in a burrow or under artificial cover.
- On average, a mature female tegu will lay around 35 eggs a year.
- In Florida, tegu eggs hatch early in the summer.
- Anything that attracts dogs, cats, or raccoons can attract a tegu!



Hatchling tegus have a green coloration on their head which usually fades within the first few months of their life. Photo by Dustin Smith, Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces.

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Local populations of breeding tegus are now known to exist in three Florida counties: Miami-Dade, Hillsborough, and Polk. Monitoring these populations and stopping the spread of this species is vital to maintaining Florida's native wildlife. Scientists are concerned that tegus will compete with and prey upon Florida's native wildlife, including some threatened species.



This map shows credible sightings of Argentine black and white tegus in Florida.

Be part of the solution!

- Don't leave pet food outside.
- Cover outdoor openings and clear your yard of debris to minimize hiding and burrowing areas.
- **Report all tegu sightings** to the exotic species hotline at **1-888-IveGot1** or online at **Ivegot1.org**.
- **Don't release exotic animals** into the Florida ecosystem. It's illegal and can be harmful to native wildlife.
- **Be a responsible pet owner.** Take the time to learn about an animal before you take one as a pet.

Tegus in Florida



Dennis Giardina, FWC

How You Can Help Stop The Spread Of An Invasive Lizard



What is a tegu?

The Argentine black and white tegu, *Tupinambis merrianae*, is an exotic lizard that has been introduced to Florida.



Tegus are an invasive species which reproduces quickly and eats a wide variety of food items, including small animals and eggs of many wildlife species. Tegus are now known to have breeding populations in Miami-Dade, Polk, and Hillsborough counties. It is believed the populations were founded by escaped or released pets. The black and white tegu is native to South America, specifically to Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina.

Tegus are black and white in color with banding along the tail. They can reach up to four feet in length. The lizards spend most of their time on land, though they can swim and may submerge themselves for long periods of time. Tegus can often be seen on roadsides or other disturbed areas. Like many reptiles, they are primarily active during the day and will burrow or hide overnight.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is currently working with other agencies and organizations to assess the threat of this species and develop management strategies. One strategy being used by FWC, the University of Florida, Miami-Dade County, and USGS is targeted trapping and removal. The goal of these partnerships is to minimize the impact of tegus on native wildlife and natural areas.



Dustin Smith, Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces

What to do if you see a tegu

1. Take a picture
2. Note the location
3. Report the sighting

Reporting your sighting will help wildlife managers better understand where the animals are found. Sightings can be reported over the phone to our exotic species reporting hotline at **1-888-Ive-Got1 (1-888-483-4681)** or online at **Ivegot1.org**. A phone app for reporting exotics is also available; search for the free IveGot1 app.



Tony Pernas, National Park Service

The FWC does not recommend that you attempt to capture the animal! While a tegu is not likely to be innately aggressive it will defend itself if aggravated or threatened. Tegus have sharp teeth, strong jaws, and sharp claws which they will use to defend themselves. The best method for removing tegus is by trapping.

If you see a tegu on your property you can contact a local wildlife trapper to remove the animal. A list of trappers in your county can be found at myFWC.com. Tegus are not protected by any of Florida's wildlife laws but local ordinances will apply depending on the location.