

# South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

## Invasive Exotic Species Strategic Action Framework

### *Prevention Case Study: Exotic Pet Amnesty Program*

#### Exotic Pets: Pathway for Invasive Species

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) **Exotic Pet Amnesty Program (EPAP)** is an innovative effort that provides exotic pet owners with an opportunity to surrender or re-home their exotic pet. Exotic pets are not native to Florida and are a primary introduction pathway for invasive wildlife in the state. It is illegal to release nonnative wildlife in Florida. Released or escaped exotic pets can present a threat to Florida's native wildlife. The goal of the amnesty program is to reduce the number of nonnative species released into the wild by pet owners by providing a convenient, legal alternative. The program also provides education and outreach regarding responsible pet ownership and exotic species in Florida.

#### Preventing the Release of Exotic Pets

The EPAP was created in 2006 and codified into law in 2008 (Chapter 68-5, F.A.C.). Through EPAP, pet owners can surrender their unwanted exotic pets, whether kept legally or illegally, without penalty or cost. The FWC also facilitates rehoming these pets with prequalified adopters. To date, over 6,100 exotic pets have been surrendered to the state through this innovative program.

People who can no longer care for their exotic pets are able to surrender these animals, including Conditional species that can no longer be acquired for personal possession in Florida, to the FWC at **Exotic Pet Amnesty Days** held throughout the state. Typically, 3-5 events are held each year. Surrendered pets are given an exam by a veterinarian and healthy animals are made available for adoption to FWC's pre-approved adopters on the same day. Conditional species can be adopted by permitted recipients only. EPAP currently has over 700 active adopters.

Exotic pet owners who cannot attend an Exotic Pet Amnesty Day can contact the FWC's **Exotic Species Hotline** at **888-Ive-Got1** (888-483-4681) for year-round assistance in finding their animal a new home.

Another goal of EPAP is to encourage responsible pet ownership through outreach and education at Exotic Pet Amnesty Day events. The FWC and partners strive to spread the "**Don't Let It Loose**" message to prevent release of nonnative wildlife into Florida.

#### Innovation Yields Success

Florida is the first state to have an established amnesty program to provide options for owners of exotic species. The framework of this program has served as a resource for other states and nations, such as Georgia, Ohio, Arizona, and Australia, working to build similar programs.

There has been continued success with FWC's EPAP. From 2006-2014, FWC held 30 events with over 2,300 exotic pets surrendered. As efforts ramped up since 2015, FWC hosted an additional 19 events with over 3,700 additional exotic pets surrendered. This total since 2015 includes over 430 Conditional animals (species that may only be imported and possessed for research purposes, commercial use, or public exhibition, not as personal pets) that were not released into the wild.



**Exotic Pet**  
**Amnesty Program**  
**Great pets. Great homes.**

For more information:  
[MyFWC.com/nonnatives](http://MyFWC.com/nonnatives)  
888-Ive-Got1 (888-483-4681)

## Interested in Adopting an Animal?

The FWC is always looking for experienced exotic pet owners to be adopters in the Exotic Pet Amnesty Program. It's free - there are no fees to apply or adopt an animal through the program. However, the cost of supporting a pet for the remainder of its life should be taken into account before applying.

In order to adopt an animal through EPAP you must apply and be approved as an adopter. The FWC requires adopters to understand how to properly care for the animals they want to adopt. Approved adopters will receive a letter of acceptance; adopters must bring their letter of acceptance to each Exotic Pet Amnesty Day event that they wish to attend.

### Steps:

- Fill out and submit an application at [MyFWC.com/Nonnatives](https://myfwc.com/Nonnatives).
- Complete an Applicant Information Form and at least one Animal Information Form. The Animal Information Form has a drop-down list of animal categories; choose one category per animal form.
- Applicants who are approved as adopters will receive a letter of acceptance from the FWC and will be informed of upcoming Exotic Pet Amnesty Days in their area.
- All adopters must apply and be approved before adopting an animal at an Exotic Pet Amnesty Day event.



Veiled chameleon at an EPAP event.

Photo courtesy of Rebekah Nelson, FWC, [Bugwood.org](https://bugwood.org)