

Not

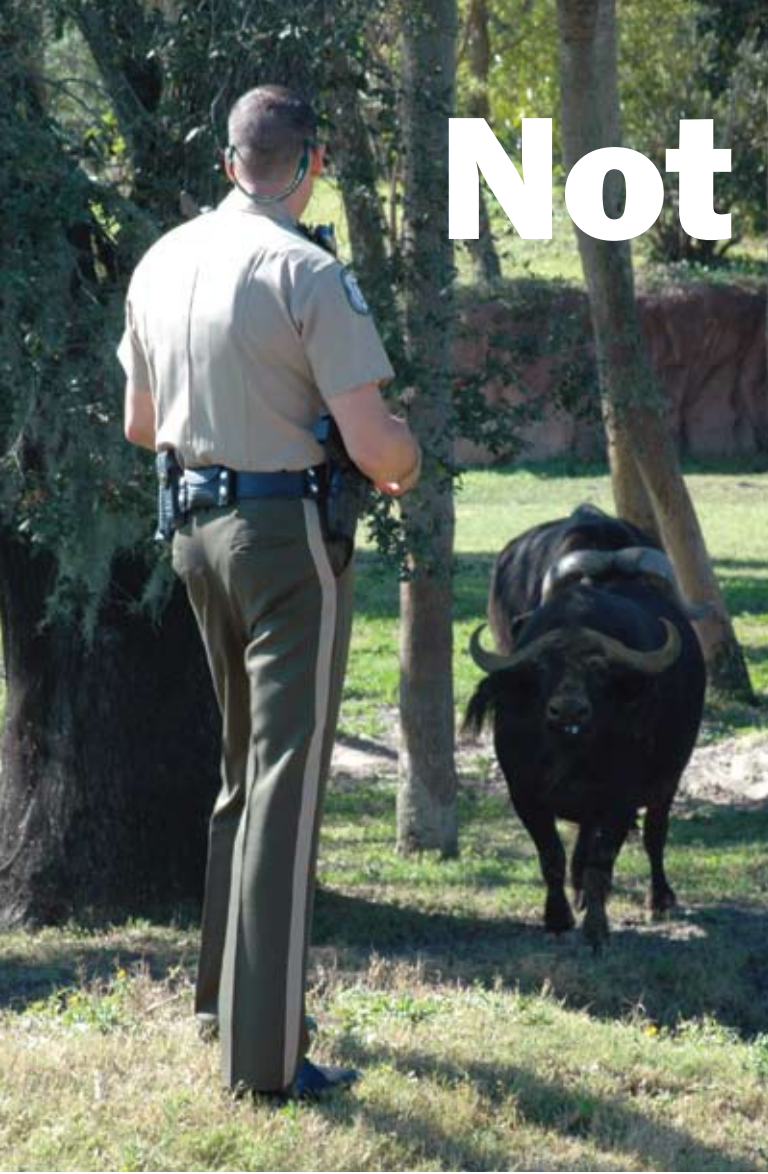
your average investigator

By Carol Pratt

Photographs by Tim Donovan

Investigator James Manson has a unique job – he inspects nonnative captive wildlife; checking their health and living conditions, and ensuring the animals are caged and handled in a manner which safeguards the public.

Florida has a multi-million-dollar fish and wildlife trade, which includes just about every animal one can think of – from Egyptian cobras to wolves. Investigators conduct inspections of certain private nonnative wildlife owners. They also inspect public establishments, such as zoos, pet stores and animal rehabilitation centers, which exhibit or sell fish and wildlife.



Investigator James Manson faces unique challenges, including a Cape buffalo (above), an African rock python (below) and a sloth bear (right) as he performs inspections at Busch Gardens and Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa.



The state has 13 investigators who, collectively, conduct approximately 5,000 inspections a year. There are an estimated 6,000 nonnative captive wildlife owners in Florida.

Land managers, biologists and other conservation specialists are kept busy removing nonnative animals from the wild and urban areas of the state. Nonnative animals can thrive in the subtropics of Florida and potentially impact the health and existence of native species. Some wildlife owners have released their nonnative animals because they became unmanageable. A Nile monitor lizard (Reptile of Concern), for example, is only a few inches long when born. They are often purchased on impulse when cute and small, but the reptiles can grow to 7 feet in length – and live for 15 years. The carnivores have a hearty appetite, and when they are released or escape, they prey on indigenous wildlife. They can also deliver a nasty bite and severe scratches to people and prey on domesticated animals. **FW**



As of Jan. 1, 2008

Requirements for owning wildlife have changed



A rare clouded leopard walks around its enclosure at the Lowry Park Zoo.

Financial requirements have increased for exhibiting venomous reptiles and Class I captive wildlife. The bond for exhibiting venomous reptiles increased from \$1,000 to \$10,000.

Class I captive wildlife exhibitors will be required to provide a surety bond or a financial responsibility guarantee of \$10,000 or maintain \$2 million in general comprehensive liability insurance, with \$2 million required per occurrence.

Acreage requirements have increased for new Class I or Class II animal facilities. Class I animals cannot be in areas zoned solely for residential use.

Experience and cage and facility requirements must be met before a permit is issued.

People licensed to possess captive wildlife, nonnative venomous snakes or Reptiles of Concern (ROCs) are required to have a Captive Wildlife Critical Incident and Disaster Plan.

People licensed to possess or exhibit Class I wildlife, nonnative venomous reptiles or ROCs must report an escape immediately to the FWC.

ROCs must be permanently identified by a microchip. Nonnative venomous reptiles must be identified by a photograph or by a microchip.

Identification photos of nonnative venomous reptiles must include sufficient distinguishing characteristics (marks, scars, patterns, etc.) to distinguish the animal from other animals of the same species.

Permanent identification requirements for ROCs or nonnative venomous reptiles possessed before Jan. 1, 2008, must be met by July 1.

Any ROC or nonnative venomous reptile acquired after Jan. 1 must be permanently identified upon acquisition of the animal.

A license (\$100 annually) is required to possess an ROC or a nonnative venomous reptile. Also, stricter caging and record-keeping requirements have been established for these species.

If you wish to sell an ROC or venomous reptile, you will need an additional license.

People who possess venomous reptiles are now required to mark cages with: "Danger, Venomous Reptile," and the type of reptile in the cage.

People who possess venomous reptiles are now required to have a bite protocol with emergency contact information and what to do should a bite occur.

People who acquire red-eared slider turtles after July 1, 2007 must have a permit.

People who possess red-eared sliders acquired before July 1, 2007 may keep those specimens without a permit until they are legally transferred or disposed of and may not allow them to reproduce, and all eggs must be destroyed.

It is illegal to release any nonnative species into the wild in Florida. Penalties for certain captive-wildlife-law violations have increased and include felony charges.



Burmese pythons are now listed as Reptiles of Concern and must be permanently identified by a microchip.

Reptiles of Concern (ROCs)

1. Indian or Burmese python
2. Reticulated python
3. African rock python
4. Amethystine or scrub python
5. Green anaconda
6. Nile monitor lizard

Class I Wildlife includes:

Lions, tigers, bears, rhinoceros, elephants, chimpanzees, gorillas, baboons, crocodiles and komodo dragons

Class II Wildlife includes:

Many species of monkeys, cougars, bobcats, coyotes and wolves

If you would like to learn more about the new Florida rules and regulations concerning possession of captive wildlife, visit MyFWC.com/permits.

To report a release of nonnative wildlife, call Wildlife Alert at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922).