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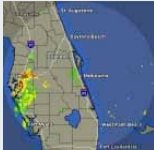
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Our little friends

Anoles, Florida's ancient reptiles, need protection.



Henry Flores of green anole from Anoles: Those Florida Yard Lizards. (HENRY FLORES / September 5, 2007)

Kenda Robertson | Special to the Sentinel
September 9, 2007

If you ever have spent any amount of time in Florida, you undoubtedly have noticed those little prehistoric-looking reptiles running across sidewalks, leaping to and from plants and trees, and hiding in cracks and crevices. As a matter of fact, being part of the Florida population means adjusting to life with yard lizards.

You probably are aware that Florida lizards range in color from bright green to black, that they munch on bugs, and that they can turn up in the most unusual of places --such as in your shoe or mailbox.

But how much do you really know about those long-tailed, beady-eyed creatures with scaly skin called "anoles" (pronounced uh-nohls)? And could you imagine life in Central Florida without them?

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[Florida Yard Lizards](#)

Orlando author and lizard enthusiast Steven B. Isham can't -- and he doesn't think we should either. In his book, *Anoles: Those Florida Yard Lizards* (Cormmahawk Publishing, \$19.95, paperback), Isham uses humor and banter to explore the lives of Florida's anoles and tells us why he thinks the little reptiles deserve our respect and protection.

With the help of two talking lizards: Ann and Noel, Isham constructs a fantasy tale that is suitable for adults and children. The book, which he says is "based almost entirely on fact," offers a great deal of interesting insight -- and clears up some common myths -- about anoles.

From their colorful "dewlaps," to their breakaway tails and precise vision, Isham thinks these acrobatic, proficient hunters that eat thousands of spiders, ants, mosquitoes

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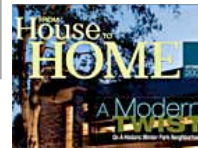
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"Older Floridians will remember the vast number of Florida's native green anoles that were around here many years ago," Isham says. "With the destruction of their habitat and pressure from the more-aggressive invader species, they have been moving away."

Although Isham says there's nothing wrong with the brown lizards taking up permanent residence here, as the two species co-exist peacefully in many parts of the world, the green natives have been getting the short end of the stick in South and Central Florida for the past 50 years.

"Green anoles are becoming increasingly rare, particularly in the southern and central portions of Florida," Isham says. "They need protection and elevation above the aggressive, ground-loving brown invaders."

Brown anoles survive in very warm climates and do well on the ground because they move fast and require less space to exist in, Isham says. But, out of necessity and the need for more space, the slower-moving green natives are adapting to the colder climates farther up the continent. Some even have been spotted as far away as Tennessee and Oklahoma.

Green anoles declining and migrating

As developers and homeowners replace tall, dense native plants, trees and shrubs in Central Florida with turf grass and lower-lying, sparser bushes, Isham says it is becoming even harder for the more docile green anoles to stay here. They need the cover and camouflage of the taller, thick-leaved plants to survive.

But what can be done to protect them for posterity?

Isham hopes that by educating more people about green anoles and why they're important to the landscape, more Florida residents will step up and help the little reptiles literally to gain some ground.

By adding more drought-tolerant, preferably native plants and trees such as yaupon hollies, Simpson's stopper, wax myrtle and gall berry to yards and landscapes, Isham thinks gardeners would reap several benefits. Not only would they save water, spend less time maintaining the garden and use fewer lawn chemicals, they also could help re-establish the green anole community.

"Unless you have lots of tall, thick shrubbery, trees and vines in your yard, you're not likely to have any native green anoles," Isham says. "If you see one of our scaly friends with that slender, elegant, lime-green body, consider it a special moment.

"Better yet, plant some tall, dense bushes to develop a green anole habitat in your own yard." Artist Henry Flores' work graces the pages of 'Anoles: Those Florida Yard Lizards.'

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lives.

"They're not only fun to watch, but they also eat lots of bugs in our yards, which helps regulate the insect population," Isham says.

Lizards that date back millions of years

Anoles have been around a long time, according to Isham's book. They have been found in fossils dating back at least 6 million years. And don't call them chameleons . . . or geckos, salamanders or skinks. Though they might share some characteristics with those critters, they are a species all their own.

In fact, Isham writes, more than 400 species of anoles exist in the world, and there are eight kinds in Florida. Only two reside in Central Florida: the green, which is native, and the Cuban brown, which was introduced here in the 1940s.

Through his comical, educational approach to storytelling, Isham hopes to send a serious message: We can all help native Florida green anoles survive. He says that Florida is slowly losing its native green lizards as they head north in search of friendlier territory.

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