



The head and neck of a tegu are much thicker than those of a Nile Monitor. The fleshy, forked tongue is red. In young animals, the head is greenish (as shown here).



The body of Black-and-white Tegus is grayish and marked with dark bands with abundant light spots in between. Other tegu species are similarly marked, but base coloration may vary (as shown below).



Several tegu species have been found in Florida, including the Red Tegu (shown here) and the Gold Tegu, which has a yellow-tan base color.

FLORIDA INVADER: Tegu Lizards

**Report sightings:
www.IveGot1.org**



The Black-and-white or Giant Argentine Tegu (*Tupinambis merianae*), native to South America, has become locally established in Manatee, Hillsborough, and Miami-Dade Counties due to releases or escapes of pets. Individual lizards belonging to several tegu species have also been captured in other areas in Florida. These large lizards grow to 4-5 feet long. Like Nile Monitor lizards, tegus are likely to eat the eggs and young of ground-nesting birds and turtles and could impact threatened and endangered species, including Gopher Tortoises. They are opportunistic predators and consume a variety of small prey as well as plant matter and carrion (dead animals). Black-and-white Tegus inhabit dry, upland areas with sandy soils, including natural, urbanized, and agricultural areas. Tegus could potentially become an agricultural pest or a source of bacterial contamination of food crops. These lizards may dig burrows, but also frequently invade the burrows of native Gopher Tortoises. They remain underground during late fall and winter months. Females lay approximately 5 eggs per clutch up to twice per year. Lifespan is 15-20 years.



Authors:

Steve A. Johnson^{1,2} and Monica E. McGarrity¹

¹University of Florida, Gulf Coast REC, Plant City, FL

²University of Florida, Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, Gainesville, FL

Footnote

1. This document is WEC295, one of a series of the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published October 2010. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on UF/IFAS Extension, visit <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu>. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Millie Ferrer-Chancy, Interim Dean.

Copyright Information

This document is copyrighted by the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) for the people of the State of Florida. UF/IFAS retains all rights under all conventions, but permits free reproduction by all agents and offices of the Cooperative Extension Service and the people of the State of Florida. Permission is granted to others to use these materials in part or in full for educational purposes, provided that full credit is given to UF/IFAS, citing the publication, its source, and date of publication.