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A small green anole lizard crawls through a hanging fern on a porch in East Hill. One author says they are being pushed out of Florida, their native habitat.

Gary McCracken/gmccracken@pnj.com
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DID YOU KNOW...

In the 120-page book, entitled "Anoles: Those Florida Yard Lizards," Orlando author Steve Isham mentions some interesting facts:

Anole males are highly territorial and will battle to protect their area and female harem during mating season, which typically runs from April through September.

Anoles have superb vision. They see vivid colors and details up to many yards away.

Anoles are not strictly cold-blooded. Their internal temperature can exceed that of mammals at times.

Details: \$19.95, Commhawk Publishing, www.anolebook.com

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Florida yard lizards

Green anoles, native to Florida, are struggling to survive, author says



Susie Forrester
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It's not easy being green.

Just ask anoles -- pronounced "an-NOLES" -- those little, bright green lizards you see racing around your back yard. And, boy, can they run fast -- almost like they are running for their lives.

Well, a new book says they may be.

You see, the little lizards, native Floridians, thank you very much, are being pushed out by a rival gang from out of town, the Cuban brown anoles, says the author of "Anoles: Those Florida Yard Lizards."

The Cubans hitched a ride to America about 60 years ago on ships pulling into our ports. And well, they took a liking to our fair state, no surprise there, and decided to settle down.

The browns are kind of like a visit from your Aunt Edna -- nice at first but then things get a little uncomfortable. But I get ahead of myself, let's talk about green anoles first.

They're not chameleons

I've always wondered what to call these green lizards; I've seen them since I was a kid in Alabama. I thought they were chameleons, most people call them salamanders, and others just say they're lizards. But no, they are anoles.

Different types of the little tropical creatures can be found all over.

"There are about seven to eight different anole species established in Florida, only one is native, the Florida green anole," said Paul Moler, a retired biologist at the Fish and Wildlife Research Lab of the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Orlando author Steve Isham is what you might call a self-educated lizard wizard. He is so fascinated by the creatures that he wrote a book about them.

Written as an educational tool for kids and adults, "Anoles" gives voice, literally, to the greens and browns and lets them educate readers about their current situation.

"I didn't know when I first started the book that it would have an environmental flavor," he said. "I learned all those things as I went along."

You see, the browns really like the greens' habitat on the ground and that's forcing the greens to seek housing upstairs -- in trees and tall shrubs and grasses.

Isham was introduced to the brown invaders and all the ruckus they are raising when he began interviews for the book.

"Some people think that the greens' days in Florida are numbered... if things continue as they are," he said.

Sympathy for the anoles

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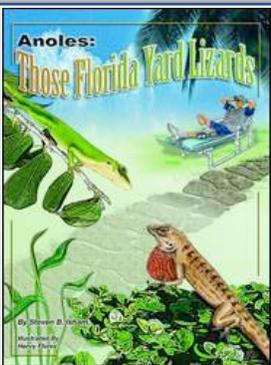
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"Anoles: Those Florida Yard Lizards," by Steve Isham
Special to the News Journal

TRUE OR FALSE

Think you know your lizards? Find out:

- No. 1: Anoles change color to blend in with their environment.
- No. 2: If broken, chewed or torn off, an anole's tail will grow back.
- No. 3: It's a little known fact that anoles have three eyes.
- No. 4: Walking vertically is impossible for these little lizards.
- No. 5: Bugs of all types need not fear anoles: They eat only grasses, leaves and flowers.
- No. 6: Birds, spiders and lawnmowers are a threat to anoles.
- No. 7: Anoles display a colorful throat fan to signal that they want to play.

ANSWERS: TRUE OR FALSE

- No. 1: False. Anoles change color because of three things: emotions, light and temperature. For example, stress, darkness, and low temperatures all may cause an anole to change color. Hormones make it happen.
 - No. 2: True. It's an escape mechanism. If a predator grabs the tail, it will break off and wiggle about while the tail-less lizard runs away.
 - No. 3: True. A small, primitive third eye on top of their heads has a lens, retina and cornea, but does not form a visual image. It's like a biological clock for the anole. By measuring length and intensity of light, it sets the anole's mood and reproductive schedule according to the seasons.
 - No. 4: False. Anoles can walk vertically up a smooth surface like glass because of ridged toe pads with thousands of microscopic hairs. They can go straight up trees with the aid of claws.
 - No. 5: False. Anoles eat many types of bugs, including crickets, small grasshoppers, aphids, ants, moths, spiders, and small cockroaches. They eat some mosquitos, but a lot of work goes into catching lunch, so anoles prefer a more substantial meal. Anoles hate lovebugs -- too acidic.
 - No. 6: True. Not all birds hunt anoles, but jays, owls, crows, mockingbirds and others do. Black racers, king snakes and other snakes also dine on anoles. Lawnmowers and weedwackers can claim lives if anoles are caught off guard.
 - No. 7: False. The throat fan, called a dewlap, is used mostly by males to intimidate other males or to attract and impress female anoles.
- Source: "Anoles: Those Florida Yard Lizards"

In his research, Isham found some experts who sympathize for the green anoles, and he began to sympathize with them as well.

"Then it began to make sense to me. You are in the northern part (of Florida, in Pensacola) and you have a lot of greens, but there are people living in the southern parts of the state who have never seen a green anole, except those who have dense landscaping."

But Moler said he sees greens and browns crawling all over the University of Florida campus in Gainesville -- they are basically sharing the space. That's one reason why he's hopeful the native greens will continue to thrive, that and the fact that the greens' natural habitat is in the tree canopies.

What can you do

Want to lend a hand to the natives?

Isham said you can create an anole-friendly environment around your home. Instead of turf grass, use ground cover, and add taller shrubs and trees. Native anoles like native plants; think thick shrubs and leafy trees.

"They like open sunny areas," said Moler. In trees, they're probably relaxing in the canopy during the day so you won't see them that much. But go outside at night, shine a flashlight in tall grasses, and you'll spot anoles, he said. The native critters like to sleep in taller grass and their green bodies shine brightly in the light.

More about the author

Isham said his anole project took three years from start to published book. And in between, he did extensive research on their history while speaking to a dozen anole experts all over the United States.

Isham didn't set out to write a book with a "let's save the anole" environmental message, but that's what he's done.

"It's there... I didn't mean to clobber people with it, it's a soft message but I hope it's a persuasive message as well."

His next project? To get the Florida native green anoles recognized as the state lizard.

"We have a state reptile, the alligator, of course, but we don't have lizard," Isham said.

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Thriving Greens

Mon Jun 11, 2007 6:39 am

The green anoles are thriving in my yard. Informative article about our lizards. Thanks.

Does anyone know what all the white lizards are that you only see at night? I have them stuck all over my home when the sun goes down. I'm not sure if they are some kind of salamander or what. Sometimes they are like a biblical plague there will be so many of them. They don't move much, just stay stuck on the walls.

Posted by: **fatdaddy**

Reader Comment

Mon Jun 11, 2007 7:27 am

More than likely a house gecko.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_Gecko

They're harmless.

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Posted by: **Aztek** Mon Jun 11, 2007 7:58 am

Pronunciation?

I thought it was pronounced "ə-nō'lē" -- yes? According to Merriam Webster, etc.

Posted by: **cavalonja** Mon Jun 11, 2007 8:42 am

Yard lizards

Ms. Forrester, thanks for a great article--well written and informative. I believe we have about an equal number of the green anoles and brown anoles in our yard. Now I will pay more attention to them and their competition for habitat.

Posted by: **larrycham** Mon Jun 11, 2007 9:06 am

Question

Those lizards you see at night are Geckos as someone previously mentioned. I have a question about them. They live in the eaves of my home along with the occasional tree frog. During the day I imagine they are up there excreting and I was wondering if anyone had ever heard of any damage they have caused to the walls from this activity.

That was a good article about the anoles. I have both green and browns around my house. I thought they were able to change their colors too so I don't know what I have.

Posted by: **HappyFrenchman** Mon Jun 11, 2007 9:14 am

i got more greens than my fair share

day and night i got more "greens" than my fair share! i think i got about 7 of the greens living in my in house via house plants that goes in and out! i harsdly see any brown ones...thought i do not go looking for them either....

Posted by: **H U** Mon Jun 11, 2007 9:41 am

Green Anoles

We have found Mikey's replacement.

Posted by: **jimary** Mon Jun 11, 2007 10:27 am

Reader Comment

Just say no to amnesty.
The government needs to stop this illegal immigration, Now. Deport them all back to their island.

oops, just joking.

In Hawaii they're called "Ghost Geckos". Those are the ones that are translucent, sickly white and only come out at night. Had one fall off the ceiling onto my face watching TV one time (Hawaii). They're harmless and in some places considered good luck.

Posted by: **Grendle** Mon Jun 11, 2007 10:45 am

Thanks

Thanks Ya'll,

Glad to hear I'm not the only one with the night crawlers. I have lived in Pensacola/Gulf Breeze all my life but I never saw these little white lizards until I moved to Gulf Breeze. I didn't know if they were unique to the Breeze or what.

Thanks again.

Posted by: **fatdaddy**

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