

Pete vs. the Python

Some dogs track criminals. Other dogs sniff out quail. In Florida, National Park Service officials are training a beagle puppy, nicknamed "Python Pete," to locate 15-foot pythons.



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"Python Pete" is being trained to track pythons, such as this one.

For years, Burmese pythons, which are not native to Florida, have been threatening to overrun Everglades National Park. Exotic pet owners introduced the reptiles to the region by dumping them in the forests of southern Florida.

The beasts have been multiplying quickly, eating native mangrove, fox squirrels, wood storks, and other wildlife. National Park Service officials removed 52 Burmese pythons from the park from the mid-1990s through 2003. In 2004, they captured 61 pythons.

That's where "Python Pete" comes in. The dog's owner, Lori Oberhofer, who works for the National Park Service, has been training Pete to track pythons and to bark when he spots one. Park officials would then spring into action, capturing and removing the reptile. Oberhofer got the idea after reading about Jack Russell terriers that detect brown tree snakes in cargo at an airport in Guam, an island in the South Pacific. "I figured that if a terrier could be trained to sniff out brown tree snakes, then perhaps a beagle could be trained to sniff out pythons," Oberhofer told *National Geographic News*.

Twice a week, Oberhofer puts a live python in a bag and drags it through a field. She then drops the bag and Pete's favorite rope toy. Oberhofer hooks Pete up to a special harness so he knows that it's time to find a snake. "He continues to show improvement each time I take him out to train," she said. "It hasn't taken him long to figure out that smelling a python means playtime for him."

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What kind of dog is "Python Pete"?

- A. bulldog
- B. Jack Russell terrier
- C. golden retriever
- D. beagle

2. The passage describes the problem of Burmese pythons threatening to overrun Everglades National Park. How is Lori Oberhofer trying to solve the problem?

- A. She is planning to teach dogs how to scare the pythons out of the park.
- B. She is training her dog to track pythons so that they can be removed.
- C. She is working with pet owners to stop them from buying pythons.
- D. She is trying to catch the pythons and ship them to Guam.

3. After reading the passage, what can you conclude about Burmese pythons?

- A. They can be trained to get along well with dogs.
- B. They are causing an increase in the number of tourists.
- C. They prefer living in Florida to anywhere else.
- D. They are having a negative impact on Florida's wildlife.

4. Read this sentence from the passage:

"Oberhofer got the idea after reading about Jack Russell terriers that detect brown tree snakes in cargo at an airport in Guam, an island in the South Pacific."

In this sentence, the word **detect** means

- A. to lose sight of a goal
- B. to teach an animal new tricks
- C. to discover the presence of
- D. to reward for good behavior

5. The primary purpose of this passage is to describe

- A. why pet owners decide to buy Burmese pythons and other exotic pets
- B. things to see and do when visiting Florida's Everglades National Park
- C. what kinds of dogs can be easily trained to track pythons and other snakes
- D. how Florida's National Park officials are trying to solve a python problem

6. How many Burmese pythons did park official capture in 2004?

7. Why, do you think, have exotic pet owners been dumping Burmese pythons in the forests of southern Florida? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

_____ Florida, officials are working to remove Burmese pythons from the park.

- A. Before
- B. For
- C. However
- D. In

9. **Vocabulary Word:** exotic: unusual and often from another country.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: