

HAVE YOU SEEN ARGENTINE BLACK AND WHITE TEGUS?

Tegus have been found in the wild in Toombs and Tattnall counties. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources is working to remove these South American lizards. Report tegu sightings and help save our native wildlife!



Adult tegu (Dustin Smith)



Adult Argentine black and white tegu (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)



Young Argentine black and white tegu (Dustin Smith)

Argentine black and white tegus grow big and hungry. They will eat the eggs of ground-nesting birds—including quail and turkeys—and other reptiles, such as alligators and gopher tortoises.

They will also eat chicken eggs, fruit, vegetables, pet food, carrion and small animals, from grasshoppers to young gopher tortoises. Tegus can carry *Salmonella* bacteria and could spread exotic parasites to native wildlife.



Identify Argentine Black and White Tegus

- Large, fast-moving terrestrial lizard, typically found on the ground
- Black to dark gray with white speckled bands across the back and tail
- Can grow up to 4 feet long and weigh up to 10 pounds
- Active during the day
- Hatchlings have green heads that fade by about 1 month of age



DNR's Jim Gillis checks a trap set for tegus. (Georgia DNR)

Tegus Are ...

- Native to South America. The Argentine black and white tegu (*Salvator merianae*) is native to Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina.
- Terrestrial lizards rarely found more than a few feet off the ground. But they are also strong swimmers and can stay submerged for an extended time. Argentine black and white tegus occupy savannas and disturbed habitats, such as forest clearings, fence rows and roadsides.
- Popular in the pet trade. In the wild, as adults they have few predators and can reproduce quickly. Reproductive-age females lay about 35 eggs a year.
- Not considered aggressive yet they will defend themselves if threatened or harassed. These reptiles can react fast, and have sharp teeth and claws and strong jaws.
- Legal in Georgia to own as pets, if tagged and registered before Dec. 4, 2023 (It is illegal to release any nonnative animal into the wild without a permit.)
- Not protected by Georgia wildlife laws or regulations, although local ordinances apply. Tegus can be legally trapped or humanely killed year-round on private property with landowner permission.

Native reptiles that tegus may be confused with:



American alligators (juveniles), a protected species (Dirk J. Stevenson)



Adult broadhead skinks (Giff Beaton)

YOU CAN HELP Report tegus in the wild (dead or alive!)

Take a photo

Note the location

Report the sighting

- Online at <https://www.gainvasives.org/argentine-black-and-white-tegu/>
- By phone to 478-994-1438
- By email to gainvasives@dnr.ga.gov