

# Not All Alien Invaders Are From Outer Space



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Brown Tree Snake  
*Boiga irregularis*

## Brown Tree Snake, *Boiga irregularis*

A native of northern Australia, eastern Indonesia, the Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea, the brown tree snake is a bird-eating monster of a reptile. Luckily, it hasn't become established in America yet. The snake currently infests the island of Guam, a U.S. territory southwest of Hawaii and east of the Philippines. It most likely reached the island after World War II concealed inside a military transport plane. Since then, the snake has literally taken over parts of the island. In some forested areas, there can be as many as 12,000 snakes/mi<sup>2</sup> (4,615/km<sup>2</sup>). That's a lot of snakes!

Adult brown tree snakes can grow as long as 9 ft (3 m) and weigh as much as 5.5 lb (2.5 kg). This snake is greenish-brown and has eyes that bulge out. When threatened, the snakes will literally stand upright. The brown tree snake is mildly poisonous and kills its prey by injecting venom. The species is a very good climber and likes to forage for food in trees and shrubs. It is nocturnal and will stalk lizards, birds, and small mammals, using its keen sense of smell.

The female brown tree snake can lay 12 eggs at a time, sometimes twice in 1 year. The young snakes hatch in about 3 months and can grow a yard in their first year.

It is almost too late to save Guam's natural wildlife from this foreign pest. The brown tree snake has decimated the island's population of birds and small mammals and amphibians. The snakes climb along electrical wires, causing at



least one power outage every 6 days. They will raid kitchens for food and eat small pets. Pet birds are a favorite of the carnivorous snakes. Occasionally, they even sneak into homes and bite sleeping adults and children.

Since the snakes have nearly saturated their niche in Guam's ecosystem, they need to find new habitat elsewhere. By slithering aboard outbound boats and planes, brown tree snakes have made it to Hawaii at least six times. Fortunately, inspectors caught the snakes each time before they could escape into the wild. It would take the escape of only one pregnant female in Hawaii to establish that very undesirable species at America's Pacific gateway.

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