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By Lauren Keith

Forget Hollywood. Global warming is making horrible movie sequels better than those hotheads in the hills can.

Soon coming to a Midwest near you: *An Inconvenient Truth 2: Motherfuckin' Snakes in the Motherfuckin' Great Plains.*

That's right. But why exactly are there snakes on this Plain?

According to a study by the U.S. Geological Survey, the python's habitat is expanding northward with the increase in temperatures caused by global warming. As the Midwest warms up, our grasslands, previously uninhabitable to such snakes, could become home to the 23-foot-long creatures.

"If we had normal, cold winters, that snake probably wouldn't survive, but we haven't had winters like that for a long time," says Joe Collins, a herpetologist with the Kansas Biological Survey.

Researchers first discovered a Burmese Python invasion in Florida in 2003. The Burmese Python, a type of Indian Python, is an invasive species, meaning that it is not native to the United States, and researchers think that the growing python population came from the offspring of a pet that someone released into the wild. The colony of pythons is now self-sustaining.

Climate models for the year 2100 show the python's potential habitat slithering north and putting a stranglehold on the eastern half of Kansas, including the Lawrence area.

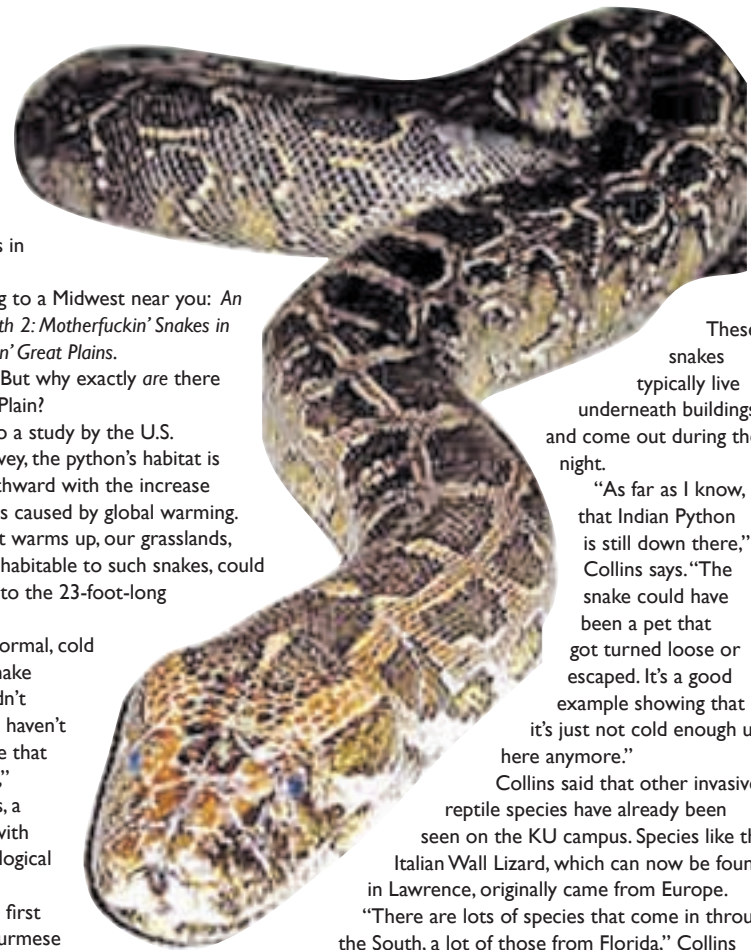
"The Indian Python is loose and breeding in the Everglades," Collins says. "It could go as far north as Kansas, but that's a hypothesis based on guesses. We aren't sure that it's going to happen."

The habitable areas for reptiles are always based on temperature because these animals are cold-blooded and must have warm weather to survive.

"Reptiles are temperature-dependent," Collins says. "If it goes down to freezing, they can die. If we have global warming, the mean annual temperature would increase so that the habitats would creep upwards."

Collins says he received a call about a year ago from a farmer who lived south of Lawrence who said he had a snake problem. The farmer mailed him the shedded skin of a large snake, which Collins says was that of an Indian Python and was about 11 feet long.

"The farmer said, 'All of my cats and small dogs are gone. What can I do?'" Collins says.



These snakes typically live underneath buildings and come out during the night.

"As far as I know, that Indian Python is still down there," Collins says. "The snake could have been a pet that got turned loose or escaped. It's a good example showing that it's just not cold enough up here anymore."

Collins said that other invasive reptile species have already been seen on the KU campus. Species like the Italian Wall Lizard, which can now be found in Lawrence, originally came from Europe.

"There are lots of species that come in through the South, a lot of those from Florida," Collins says. "There are 64 kinds of invasive species in the U.S., and many have been moving north."

Collins says Mediterranean Geckos were discovered two years ago in Lenexa. The geckos were crawling under warehouse lights in the business district.

"There is a lot of lumber here from Florida," he says. "The animals can escape when packages or crates break. Florida has a big, big problem. All kinds of things are loose down there."

As Kansas' climate gets warmer, the eastern part of the state would provide a better habitat to animals previously found in wetland-filled areas like Florida.

"It's more humid here in the eastern part of the state, so we would have more tropical animals," Collins says. "Desert animals would probably do better in the western part."

Calling these recently moved-in species invasive is somewhat misleading. At least with amphibians and reptiles, Kansas' ecosystems have not seen many negative impacts, Collins says.

"There are no problems that we know of," he says. "We could not find any bacteria or diseases. Many think that the python poses a danger to humans, but I don't think so. But who knows what will ultimately happen. This definitely changes things."