

Ball Python



Common name: Ball python

Latin name: Python regius

Native to: Central and western Africa

Size: Adults average in size from three to five feet

Life span:

Ball pythons are one of the longest-lived snakes. It is not unusual for these pythons to live 20 - 30 years in captivity.

One specimen lived for 47 years at the Philadelphia Zoo.

Animal description:

Ball pythons are named for their defense behavior of rolling into a tight ball with their head in the middle. Like all other pythons, ball pythons have spurs at their vents. There are many different color morphs and patterns available today in captive bred specimens. The "standard" ball python has large chocolate brown markings with lighter medium-brown spots interspersed between the darker spots. The belly is generally off-white or a pale gray.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure:

Remember that all snakes are escape artists and when designing an enclosure it is of the utmost importance that whatever enclosure is used is made as escape-proof as possible. Generally an adult ball python should be kept in a 30-gallon sized enclosure (12 inches x 36 inches).

Temperature:

Daytime temperatures should be maintained at 80° - 85° F with a basking temperature of 90° - 95° F. Nighttime temperatures should be 75° - 80° F. Heat/Light: There has been no evidence to suggest that photo periods affect the keeping of ball pythons. If a regular photo period is provided it is recommended to use fluorescent bulbs in order to minimize the extra heat generated by incandescent bulbs.

When providing heat, do NOT use hot rocks. Hot rocks are notoriously unpredictable and can cause serious burn injuries to your animal. Red basking bulbs or ceramic emitters can be used to generate basking spots. Under the tank heating pads can also be used to help

raise the ambient temperature of the enclosure. It is recommended to routinely check the temperatures of the enclosure with thermometers.

Substrate: Newspaper and newsprint make excellent substrate even though it is not very attractive. It is easy to clean and is excellent to use when acclimating new ball pythons to their enclosure. Wood shavings can also be used, though cedar should never be used and some pine can also cause health problems as well. Aspen shavings are usually an excellent choice if using wood shavings. If keeping the snake on wood shavings, care should be taken when feeding the snake to avoid shavings becoming lodged in the snake's mouth.

Environment:

Like all snakes, ball pythons are strictly carnivorous. Adult ball pythons can be fed two to three adult mice per week. Hatchlings and juvenile animals can be fed one appropriately sized prey item per week (i.e fuzzies for hatchlings, hoppers for slightly older animals).

It is important to note here that ball pythons are notorious for not eating on a regular schedule. This is especially true of wild caught specimens. Whenever possible try to obtain captive bred snakes that have already fed to minimize problems eating. If your new ball python does not eat immediately it is important to not panic. Ball pythons have been known to go months without eating and there are records of ball pythons of not eating for 22 months. Often a variety of foods may need to be offered in order to get the snake to eat and often many will only eat live food. If you are experience difficulty getting your ball python to eat you may need to consult several more in-depth texts on the subject. One excellent resource is The Ball Python Manual (see references below).

Diet: Hatchlings can be started off feeding on pinkie mice. Juveniles and adults can gradually take larger prey of fuzzy mice, adult mice or young rats. Young snakes can be fed 1 - 2 times a week. Thawed frozen rodents are the easiest and safest way to feed snakes. A supply can be kept in your freezer and there are no problems from live mice biting your snake. Water should be provided in a bowl. The snake will drink from it and may soak itself before it sheds.

Maintenance:

Fresh water should be offered daily. If using newsprint then clean as needed. Wood shavings should be spot cleaned as needed. Periodically, the enclosure should be disinfected. A 5% bleach solution makes an excellent disinfectant. Be sure to rinse the enclosure thoroughly after disinfecting. As always, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly after handling your ball python or any cage accessories.

Recommended reading:

de Vosjoli, Phillip, et al. The Ball Python Manual. Santee: Advanced Vivarium Series 1995

Knutson, Billy. "Ball Python Care Sheet." The Python Hunter. Retrieved 8 October 2001

Kaplan, Melissa. "Ball Pythons." Updated 26 March 2000. Retrieved 8 October 2001

<http://www.anapsid.org/ball.html>