

SPOTTED, CHILDREN'S, ANTHILL, AND STIMSON'S PYTHON CARE SHEET

(Genus *Antaresia*)

****For generalized, background information on snake care and husbandry, please see the "General Snake Care Sheet" first****

The spotted python, along with other members of the genus *Antaresia* (which include the Stimson's- *Antaresia stimsoni*, Pygmy or Antill python- *Antaresia perthensis*, and Children's pythons-*Antaresia childreni*), are among the smallest genera of all python species worldwide. As such, these small and docile pythons are popular in both American and Australian herpetoculture. Found from the Australian Cape York Peninsula to New South Wales, these primarily crepuscular or nocturnal hunters are often known to wait in ambush for bats at the mouths of caves or other areas where bats reside.

Taxonomy

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Serpentes

Family: Pythonidae

Genus: *Antaresia*

Antaresia Species

Children's Python (*Antaresia childreni*): Occurs primarily in the northern, northwestern, and north eastern Australian territories including Queensland.

Stimson's Python (*Antaresia stimsoni*): Ranges from the Australian west coast to central Australia.

Pygmy/Anthill Python (*Antaresia perthensis*): Often occurs with ant and termite mounds (hence its common name) of extreme Northwestern Australia and surrounding coastal islands.

Spotted Python (*Antaresia maculosa*): Occurs in the Cape York Peninsula region, through the eastern Queensland coast, to New South Wales regions of Australia.

***Overall Difficulty Level: Novice**

Because of their small size and docility, spotted pythons (and other *Antaresia*) present suitable first choices for the beginning reptile enthusiast provided they possess a general knowledge and understanding of reptile, specifically snake, husbandry. Given the proper care, Spotted, Children's, and Stimson's pythons can attain longevity of 15-20 years in captivity on average.

Size and Description

As hatchlings, this genera of python typically range from 5-10 inches in length. As adults, *Antaresia* can range between three and five feet (or 36-60"). As adults, Stimson's and Spotted

pythons average three to four feet (or 36-48"). Children's pythons attain slightly smaller sizes, up to three feet (36"). These small python species has a ground color of grayish, tan, to olive brown with numerous closely spaced black or dark brown dorsal spots and blotches. There are usually many large and irregular brown to reddish brown lateral spots and blotches or mottling as well. The head is fairly small with black to dark brown mottling, a single dark post ocular stripe behind each eye, and the presence of heat sensitive labial pits.

Temperament and Handling

Hatchlings to juveniles, like many species of snake, are often initially more defensive and wary of being handled. They may musk and defecate, and attempt to bite in response to what they perceive as a potential threat (you handling them). However, with patience and gentle handling, these pythons can become much more tolerant to being handled and can be worked with more easily. Normally, most adults are mild mannered snakes that are reluctant to bite and are easily handled. It should be kept in mind however that even a supposedly docile snake may bite or react defensively if suddenly startled or frightened or when food is detected (resulting in a feeding response bite).

Enclosure/Housing

The enclosure you choose must be secure to prevent the escape of the inhabitant and provide adequate ventilation. Hatchling to juveniles can be maintained in a 10-15 gallon long glass terrarium with a secure screen top. Larger numbers of hatchling to juvenile Antaresia can be kept in commercially available rack systems consisting of appropriately sized plastic shoe box sized containers with holes melted or punched for ventilation. These containers are made by Iris, Rubbermaid, and Sterilite. Rack systems are usually heated with Flexwatt heat tape either installed along the back wall of the rack as back heat or on the rear half of the floor of each slot as belly heat, and should be monitored with a quality thermostat.

Adult Spotted, Stimson's, and Children's pythons can easily be maintained in a 20-30 gallon long glass terrarium or similar sized commercially available plastic, wooden, melamine, or PVC enclosures with front opening sliding or hinged acrylic or glass doors if one chooses. These types of enclosures provide increased security for snakes within them and space can be better utilized with them as they are stackable. Temperature and humidity can also be relatively easy to control within these cages, and most are available with built in lighting and heating elements. Adults can also be kept in commercially available rack systems consisting of appropriate sized sweater to blanket box sized containers (28-32 quarts or similar sized), as previously described.

A hide-box for allowing the snake to retreat from view is recommended as part of a terrarium setup as well. Besides commercially available hide boxes, you could modify many things to serve as a hide box. They can include opaque plastic storage container, plastic litter pans for cats, and inverted flowerpots for example. A water dish should also be provided within the enclosure and be changed at least once weekly or sooner if fouled. The dish should be heavy enough so that it isn't easily tipped over (plastic or ceramic crock dishes work well). It should also be cleaned and disinfected periodically.

Temperature and Heating

As with all reptiles, these pythons are ectothermic animals, meaning it is important to provide them with an external heat source and thermal gradient for proper digestion and gestation. There should be a warm side and a cooler side to the enclosure. To create the warm side, you can use an under tank heater (UTH), Flexwatt heat tape, or a radiant heat panel on one half of the enclosure. Many commercially available plastic and PVC enclosures and racks come with their own heating elements. The warm side should remain around 88-90 degrees Fahrenheit. It is also important to disallow any snake to come into direct contact with any heating element, as thermal burns can result, and can sometimes be severe, requiring professional veterinary attention. UV or other overhead lighting is not required for most species of snakes, particularly primarily nocturnal species such as spotted pythons. However, overhead UV lighting or fluorescent lighting can improve the cage's aesthetics as well as visibility within.

Substrate

The substrate is the enclosure's bedding. Newspaper, commercially available cage liner material, cypress mulch, or coconut husk fibers are all acceptable substrates to use for any of the *Antaresia* species. Avoid pine and cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. The substrate should be kept dry and be spot cleaned when needed to reduce the likelihood of bacterial outbreaks. A complete substrate change and replacement should be done periodically as well, with that interval depending on the substrate being used.

Feeding and Diet

As with all pythons and boas, *Antaresia* pythons are non venomous constrictors. They will consume rodents and other small mammals, birds, bats, lizards, and the occasional amphibian in their native ranges.

Initially as hatchlings or juveniles, many *Antaresia* are known to be somewhat finicky eaters and may require some persuasion through live prey or lizard scenting techniques on frozen thawed rodents in order to become established feeders. However, once they are started on rodents, they can be fed two to three times weekly on pinkie or lizard scented mice. The size of the prey item should be increased accordingly as the snake grows. A general rule of thumb to follow is to offer prey items that are no larger than the widest point of the snake. Adults can be offered adult mice every five to seven days and usually do not present any feeding difficulties. It is important to not to overfeed them however, since obesity and compromised health of the snake can result over time.

Summary

The genus *Antaresia*, consisting of the Children's python (*A. childreni*), Stimson's python (*A. stimsoni*), Antihill python (*A. perthensis*), and Spotted python (*A. maculosa*), are among the smallest taxa of pythons in the world, ranging from only three to five feet on average depending on the species. Although hatchlings may initially be somewhat reluctant feeders, all of these unique species remain at small, easily manageable sizes as adults and typically fare quite well in captivity, making them enjoyable animals to keep despite them being oftentimes much underrated and overlooked animals in the herpetocultural hobby and industry.