

RETICULATED PYTHON CARE SHEET

(Python/Broghammerus reticulatus)

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

The reticulated python, also known as Broghammerus reticulatus (although there is some debate on whether this is a valid genus), is a very wide ranging species of python, found from Southeast Asia, throughout the Phillipenes, and Indonesia. Reticulated pythons derive the name "reticulated" from their intricate pattern of diamond to net-like blotches that enable the snake to blend in or camouflage while on the forest floor extremely well. This particular species of python is also widely thought to be the longest species of snake, reaching lengths of up to 30 feet, and rivaled only by the Green Anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*) of South America. Despite their size, the mainland Reticulated pythons, or "retics" as they are commonly referred to, have become increasingly popular in the reptile industry and are now being bred in several albino, tiger, calico, and sunfire morphs, as well as several dwarf to super dwarf varieties.

***Overall Difficulty Level: Intermediate-Advanced**

While many captive born and well established mainland Reticulated pythons can become relatively docile animals with consistent handling, they nevertheless become very large and powerful snakes that require experienced handling. Potential owners should have previous knowledge and experience with keeping and handling large constrictors safely and properly prior to obtaining a reticulated python. Keeping the dwarf to super dwarf varieties can be done at the intermediate level however, but as mentioned below, are often somewhat more active and flighty snakes compared to mainland retics and, like all retics, often possess very aggressive feeding responses. Given the proper care, reticulated pythons can attain longevity of 30-40 years in captivity, sometimes more.

Mainland reticulated pythons can attain very large sizes and are not suitable for the inexperienced reptile keeper or handler. Do your research well before acquiring a large snake!*

Reticulated Python Taxonomy

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Serpentes

Family: Pythonidae

Genus: Broghammereus

Species Epithet: Python/*Broghammereus reticulatus*

Size and Description

As hatchlings, reticulated python hatchlings are usually around 24” in length. As adults, the mainland forms can attain sizes anywhere from 10 to 25 feet, with females typically attaining larger sizes than males. The current known record for a captive reticulated python was 33 feet. Dwarf forms, such as those from Jampea, often do not attain as large of sizes however, and typically reach 9-12 feet (or 108-144”). Smaller still are the super dwarf forms, which attain only six to nine feet on average (or 72-108”) and are far more manageable for a wider range of keepers and hobbyists. The reticulated python has numerous yellowish to tan-brown diamond shaped or “reticulate” dorsal blotches outlined in black on a silver-gray to tan background color. There are often black and white triangular and linear lateral spots and dashes. The head is unmarked tan-brown or yellowish in color with a single narrow dark post ocular stripe behind each eye. Like most pythons, there are heat sensitive labial pits present.

There are now currently numerous color and pattern morphs and combinations of “Retics” being produced including Albinos, Tigers, Super Tigers, Yellow Heads, Paradoxes, Sun fires, Ivories, Genetic Stripes, Titaniums, Platinums, and Golden Childs to name a few.

Temperament and Handling

Reticulated pythons have initially widely been believed to be nasty, untrustworthy, and difficult snakes to keep and maintain in captivity. I am one of the belief that adult Retic pythons are usually what their keepers make them. This is a species that has long held a bad reputation for being aggressive and unpredictable animals. On one hand, a keeper may end up with an animal stereotypical to this notion as a result of their inactions. On the other end of the spectrum, Retics CAN also make relatively traceable, alert, and inquisitive animals as adults if handled correctly and frequently from an early age. 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).

As with the other large constrictors, mainland forms of Reticulated pythons can become very large and powerful snakes as adults. Therefore it is important to follow several husbandry, handling, and safety protocols when handling large snakes safely and correctly by not placing a snake around your neck or upper torso, or allowing unsupervised contact with young children or others who may not be experienced in handling a large snake. Every incident involving a snake, or other reptile, undoubtedly fuels further legislation against keeping reptiles and further sensationalized negative publicity/media coverage towards the reptile hobby as a whole. When handling or interacting with large Retics or other large constrictors, is often has been suggested that at least a second person be present or at least within calling distance.

Enclosure/Housing

The enclosure you choose must be secure to prevent the escape of the inhabitant and provide adequate ventilation. Hatchling to juvenile retics can be maintained in a 20-30 gallon long glass terrarium with a secure screen top. To retain adequate humidity if using a glass terrarium, the screen top can be partially covered with an appropriate sized piece of glass while still enabling adequate ventilation. Larger numbers of hatchling to juvenile retics can be kept in commercially available rack systems consisting of appropriately sized plastic shoe boxes to sweater box sized containers with holes melted or punched in 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

Please note that adult mainland Retics can become very large and powerful snakes which require very sturdy and secure caging, preferably with locking mechanisms. The most practical caging for housing adult Retics are the commercially available plastic, wooden, melamine, or PVC enclosures with front opening sliding or hinged acrylic or glass doors. 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 is relatively easy to maintain within these enclosures, and most are available with built in lighting and heating. Depending on the size of the snake, up to 96" caging may be required for these large snakes. It is therefore important to consider whether one has space to adequately house and maintain a large constrictor prior to obtaining one. Subadults and adults up to a certain size can also be kept in commercially available rack systems consisting of appropriate sized sweater to blanket box sized or larger tubs (74 quarts) such as those provided by ARS or Freedom Breeder Caging. These rack systems are commonly used to house medium to large boas and pythons. Super Dwarf varieties, however, can in most cases be adequately maintained in 48" X 24" caging.

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, reticulated 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 88-92 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, including reticulated 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 for reticulated pythons. 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 species of boas and pythons, reticulated pythons are non venomous constrictors. In their native range, reticulated pythons are opportunistic feeders, and have been known to consume a variety of rodents and other small to medium sized mammals (including deer, and monkeys), birds, and occasionally reptiles such as lizards. This species has even been reported, although very rarely, to take crocodiles, and even leopards as well.

Hatchling reticulated pythons can be started off once every five to seven days on rat pups or adult mice. The size of the prey item should then 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. As adults, retics will need large prey items such as rabbits or even pre-killed goats or pigs depending on the size of the snake. ***The cost of, and locating sources for these large prey items are two things to consider before acquiring a large snake such as a retic.*** If you cannot afford to feed a large snake, do not obtain one. Retics also normally have very strong feeding responses and seldom present any refusals to feed. A large snake can be a powerful and potentially dangerous animal at feeding time when it detects food in the vicinity. Therefore it is important to not let the scent of the prey item come into contact with you. Otherwise you will be mistaken as food. Despite their strong feeding responses, It is important to not to overfeed your reticulated python, since obesity and compromised health of the snake can result over time.

Summary

For quite some time, Reticulated pythons, or “Retics” as they are commonly known as in the herpetocultural hobby and industry, were limited in their popularity (at least initially) due to the extremely large sizes that mainland forms typically attain, as well as for their bad reputation for aggressiveness among “large constrictors” that is often cited by much of the literature available to the public. However, as the keeping and captive propagation of “Retics” and many morphs and strains thereof of Tigers, Super Tigers, Albinos, Sunfires, and others became more widespread, these notions in recent years have been proven, however, to be based largely on wild caught and imported animals rather than captive bred and born specimens. Many keepers and herpetoculturists frequently report higher levels of awareness and intelligence among Retics than many other large boids, which combined with their beauty and extremely large sizes, is often why they are considered by many to be the “king of constrictors”. In recent years especially, many strains and localities of “dwarf” and even “super dwarf” Retics as small as six to seven feet have also enjoyed at least some appeal and popularity amongst a wider range of the public and reptile keepers and breeders expressing interest in reticulated pythons but yet not wishing to contend with the often very large sizes of mainland “Retics”. Responsible large constrictor ownership and acquisition protocols should always be encouraged and practiced when considering this, or any other of the “large constrictor” species, as the results of any failure to do so almost always result in additional negative publicity for the entire herpetocultural hobby as well as support for increased restrictions and bans on the ownership of reptiles and oftentimes, many other “exotic” animals as well.