



*Ball-Python Addiction.

Ball or Royal Python (*Python regius*)

The World's Most Popular Pet Snake

Also known as Royal pythons, ball pythons are a small python species which earn their name from their habit of coiling into a tight ball with their head in the center when threatened or attacked. Ball pythons are a small, very heavy bodied python with a black to dark brown ground color and large, light brown to yellowish brown loaf shaped dorsal and lateral blotches. A pale whitish or yellowish stripe also usually runs along each side of their eyes and head as well. As with the similarly related Angolan python (*Python anchietae*), ball pythons are nocturnal and crepuscular, and are also largely fossorial, spending much of their time underground in burrows or termite mounds constructed by other animals. Hundreds of color and pattern cultivars or morphs of ball pythons are kept and bred in captivity including albinos, spiders, pinstripes, pastels, enchis, genetic stripes, and many others to name only a few of the base morphs. Ball pythons are arguably the number one pet snake species in popularity due to their size, docility, and array of color and pattern morphs and overall variants.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Serpentes

Infraorder: Alethinophidia

Family: Pythonidae

Genus: Python

Species: *Python regius**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, ball pythons can attain longevity of at least 20 to 25 years or more. Up to 40 years is not unheard of as well.

Distribution and Habitat

The ball, or royal python, occurs in a broad area of sub-Saharan, western to central Africa, where they occur in the Sudanese subprovince west of the Nile, to southern Sudan, the Bahrel Ghazal

and Nuba Mountain regions of Senegal. They also occur within the Togolese Republic, the Republic of Ghana, and the Sierra Leone of West Africa, as well as the Ivory Coast. Within this range, they may occur in semi-arid grasslands, open forests, woodlands, and savannahs, agricultural, and residential areas. They are primarily a crepuscular to nocturnal species, being most active during the dawn and dusk, and spend much of their time during the day in burrows, termite structures, and other natural shelters.

Origin/History

Python regius (Shaw, 1802). The first proposed scientific name for ball pythons was *Boa regius*, described by Zoologist George Shaw in 1802.

The ball python, or royal python, has become arguably the world's most popularly kept pet snake species. The first ball pythons to enter the pet industry in the U.S. were imported during the 1960's to late 1970's from western Africa, most notably from the countries of Togo, Benin, and Ghana. These snakes were, and still are to an extent this day, collected from underground burrows or other means by exporters. Interestingly, through the early 1990's, the ball python initially was not widely bred in captivity in the U.S. This was due to a few reasons, including the fact that most animals were then still wild-collected adults which proved difficult to breed in captivity, and did not feed well or were very picky eaters, lending to their negative reputation as such. Despite their small sizes and inoffensive temperaments, and attractive colors and patterns, they were seen initially as inexpensive and "common" snake species.

However, 1992 proved to be the year where the ball python's popularity, and success in being able to be kept and bred in captivity changed with the discovery and breeding of the first albino or amelanistic ball python by U.S. python breeder Bob Clark. Several other color and pattern morphs were also subsequently imported during this same time during the early to mid 1990's including the "pinstripe", "pastel", "spider", "piebald", and others. During this same period, ball pythons become much more well-established in captivity, feeding and breeding in captivity much more readily than before. As such, and by the mid to late 1990's to early 2000's, the popularity and availability of these snakes had exploded, and now hundreds upon thousands of different color and pattern morphs and combinations are available.

This had made the ball python quite possibly the world's most popular and widely kept pet snake species.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate depending on experience and knowledge level, and expectations.

Size

Ball, or royal pythons range from 8 to 12 inches as hatchlings, and 3 to 5 feet, or 36 to 54 inches as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling ball pythons can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult ball pythons should be housed in a minimum of a 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure OR a 4' x 2' x 2' enclosure. Ball pythons are primarily terrestrial, and floor space is more important than height. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding such as cage liner paper material, fine aspen shavings, cypress mulch, or coconut fibers. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide additional basking and hiding opportunities using live or artificial foliage, rocks, logs, driftwood, or other hides. Also be sure to include a sturdy water

bowl or dish as well.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized UTH (or tank heating pad), ceramic or radiant heat emitter, or incandescent, UVA/UVB, or other heat producing bulb. Ideal temperatures for ball pythons range from 75 to 82 degrees F on the cool side and 85 to 92 degrees F on the warm side. Most species of snakes have fairly simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. Also be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least once per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Ball pythons should be maintained at relatively moderate relative humidity levels, which may range from about 55 to 60%, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, ball pythons are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, and other smaller vertebrates. In captivity, ball pythons can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. In most circumstances, it is recommended to provide humanely pre-killed rodents acquired from a reputable source, as offering live rodents to any snake can carry risk of serious injury or even death to your snake when the rodent bites to defend itself or otherwise gnaws on your animal. A general rule of thumb when selecting feeder rodent sizes for your snake is to provide prey items that are approximately the same width as the snake's widest point. It should also be noted that many snakes may refuse food for longer periods of time over several weeks or months, especially in the fall and winter months or if several other husbandry conditions are not being met. While this can be alarming to new pet owners, it is oftentimes normal, but their overall health and weight should be monitored during these times to make sure they do not lose weight or otherwise deteriorate. Most snakes typically are fed whole prey items, and do not usually require additional calcium or vitamin D3 supplementation unless otherwise directed. Their feeding frequency will also depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

As with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile ball pythons may initially be nervous and defensive. Ball pythons will initially "ball up", or less frequently, bite if frightened. Handle your ball python gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most ball pythons will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:

Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any

species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. We cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety.

***Copyright, 2023**