



**Photo Credit: Lord Dragonstar*

Bismarck Ringed Python (*Bothrochilus boa*)

A One of a Kind Species

Bismarck ringed pythons are a medium sized, terrestrial to fossorial (burrowing) species of monotypic genus of pythons. As juveniles or hatchlings, Bismarck ringed pythons are vibrantly colored and patterned with a series of black and orange to yellow-orange rings or banding, or sometimes irregular banding. Color intensity and contrast often lessen into adult animals, however, with the orange or yellow orange often becoming a duller yellow or orange, yellow brown, or brown. Some animals may even become mostly brown or black in appearance and appear melanistic as adults, with only a faint trace of their banding. The head also wedge shaped and tends to be black or dark colored, and the scales and skin are iridescent. Bismarck ringed pythons also possess several other features indicative of a fossorial lifestyle, including nares (or nostrils) and labial pits located along the sides and back of their faces and heads rather than on top to prevent closing of nasal passageways with substrate, and an aforementioned wedge shaped head for burrowing. As with most pythons, the Bismarck ringed pythons are primarily nocturnal, with most of their activity taking place at dawn, dusk, or at night. They are also a primarily terrestrial species, although they can climb (as can most snakes).

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: *Bothrochilus*

Species: *Bothrochilus boa**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Bismarck ringed pythons have the potential to attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more. Up to 35 to 40 years is also known.

Distribution and Habitat

The Bismarck ringed python is a unique species of medium sized, terrestrial python indigenous primarily to the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, located along the northwestern to northeastern coast of New Guinea, and part of Papua New Guinea. Within this range, Bismarck ringed pythons occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-fossorial environments, including primary to secondary, lowland tropical to sub-tropical rainforests, woodlands, and savannahs, to coastal areas, as well as near agricultural, cultivated, and suburban areas, or other disturbed habitats such as plantations, where they are most often found in burrows and humid, ground vegetation and debris such as fallen coconut husks, leaves, and other, similar humid micro-environments.

Origin/History

Bothrochilus boa (Schlegel, 1837),

Bismarck ringed pythons are still relatively rare in collections and not often seen for sale. They can sometimes be found for sale on the internet or at larger reptile expos. Captive-born ringed pythons are all that have been offered for sale for many years, which would become good for the buyer because captive-born animals are healthier and always preferred over imported animals (Tom Keogan 2014). Little is known, however, as to when exactly Bismarck ringed pythons first entered herpetoculture or were first imported.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Bismarck ringed python hatchlings are typically 7 to 10 inches in length. They are a medium sized python species that reaches 4 ½ to 7 feet, or 54 to 84 inches on average as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Fossorial. Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Hatchling Bismarck ringed pythons can be started out in a 20 gallon long terrarium or similar sized enclosure, but will soon require larger accommodations. If glass enclosures are used at any point, be sure that the enclosure retains sufficient humidity. Many of the commercially made plastic or fiberglass enclosures, or otherwise custom-designed enclosures that can retain heat and humidity well are perhaps the best and most practical enclosures to use to house mid to large sized boas and pythons. Depending on the age and size of the animal, a four to six foot by two foot enclosure or larger is required. Bismarck ringed pythons can be maintained on a substrate of fine aspen shavings, cage liner material, cypress mulch, or sphagnum fir mixtures, but always ensure that the substrate does not become too damp or moist. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. These pythons will also require a large sturdy water dish or tub that must be cleaned, sanitized, and changed regularly, especially if dirtied. Providing an adequately sized humid hidebox, artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, logs, and other cage furnishings can also provide additional hiding and basking opportunities. Bismarck ringed pythons will climb if given the opportunity, but floor space is more important than height.

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 Bismarck ringed pythons range from 75 to 82 degrees F on the cool side and 85 to 90 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. Bismarck ringed pythons should be maintained at relatively moderate to high relative humidity levels, which may range from about 60 to 80%, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, Bismarck ringed pythons are carnivorous, and will prey upon a wide range of small mammals, birds, amphibians, and other reptiles that they can ambush, locate, and consume. In captivity, Bismarck ringed pythons can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Some may require initial or additional scenting with other food items to induce them to eat. In most general circumstances, it is recommended to provide humanely pre-killed prey animals acquired from a reputable source, as offering live animals to any snake can carry risk of serious injury or even death to your snake when the prey item bites to defend itself or otherwise gnaws on your animal. A general rule of thumb when selecting feeder prey item 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 these things can be alarming, 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 ringed pythons are often initially more nervous and nippy. It is important to always handle them gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Well established ringed pythons also possess voracious feeding responses, and some level of care is required when handling or removing them from an enclosure to prevent a feeding related bite. They can also still be a somewhat shy and cage defensive species. However, if they are handled and worked with regularly, this species can settle down considerably and can make for very active and attractive species to maintain.

Ringed pythons are a shy species that are not the most suitable python for beginners due to their potential adult size, humidity requirements, and overall availability, but for the adequately experienced and prepared intermediate to advanced reptile keeper, these pythons often make fine and unique additions to most any reptile collection.

****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

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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

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