



\*Matthew Nauman

## Blood and Short Tailed Pythons (*Python curtus*), (*Python brongersmai*), (*Python kyaiktiyo*), and (*Python breitensteini*)

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### **Big Snakes in a Mid-Sized Package**

Blood and short tailed pythons are medium sized, yet VERY heavy bodied species of pythons with a large, wedge shaped head. Background color can vary, but is usually red to reddish brown or brown with yellowish or cream colored blotches or often a broken dorsal stripe. Large, lighter colored irregular “alien head” shaped blotches characterize the sides. Three species, all with similar care requirements. **Borneo Short tailed Python (*Python breitensteini*)**, **Sumatran Black Blood Python (*Python curtus*)**, **Myanmar Short tailed Python (*Python kyaiktiyo*)**, and **Red Blood Python (*Python brongersmai*)**. Blood and short tailed pythons are sedentary ambush predators, laying motionless for up to several days or even weeks in leaf litter and other ground debris until prey passes along. The blood and short tailed pythons are quickly becoming increasingly popular species, and their negative reputations as nasty and difficult to care for species are rapidly diminishing as more captive breeding of these species is taking place. For anyone seeking a large snake personality in a medium sized python, the blood and short tailed pythons are an excellent choice!

### **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 curtus*\*, *Python breitensteini*\*, *Python kyaiktiyo*\*, and *Python brongersmai*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, blood and short tailed pythons can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more. Up to 35 to 40 years is also not unheard of.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

The blood and short tailed pythons consist of several species of medium sized, to large,

terrestrial to semi-aquatic pythons indigenous to southern and southeastern Asia. More specific ranges are dependent upon the exact species, although these species of pythons generally occur from Sumatra and the remainder of Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, to western Malaysia and Singapore. Within this range, blood and short tailed pythons occupy primarily humid, terrestrial to semi-aquatic environments, including tropical to sun-tropical, lowland rainforests and other tropical forests and woodlands, to humid, forested marshes, tropical swamplands, suburban and other areas near human habitations, to moist agricultural areas and irrigated croplands. These medium sized, heavy bodied pythons especially favor these above habitats when they are well vegetated, and located near permanent to semi-permanent bodies of water such as rivers, streams, and riverine basins, marshes and swamplands, and other pools of water.

### **Origin/History**

*Python curtus* Schlegel, 1872; *Python brongersmai* Stull, 1938; *Python breitensteini* Steindachner, 1880.

From about the 1940's through 1970's, information about the blood or short-tailed pythons was very nearly absent from herptile publications or zoo literature during this time period. It has been surmised that there were a few reasons for this, one being these large bodied, mid-sized pythons were not commonly available; back then, shipments of live animals from Asia typically were by sea (or boat), and most reptiles did not fare well to the cool and damp conditions of shipping. A second reason was most, if not all blood pythons that were available back then were wild-collected animals, and recent imports developed bad reputations for being irascible and acclimating poorly to captivity. Larger species of pythons such as Burmese and Reticulated pythons tended to be more favored in zoological collections at the time.

Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, blood pythons were also a very heavily exploited species for the skin trade in Malaysia and Sumatra, but were seldom acquired for the live pet trade. Typically, only large adult animals were selected for the skin trade, and even though they could be acquired for very little money during the 1970's, shipping them proved to be cost prohibitive at the time. Blood pythons also tended to be a more secretive species, with young animals being more difficult to locate.

Prior to 1985, the only available blood pythons were from western Malaysia and southwestern Thailand, known as the Malay Peninsula. Both of these countries ceased most commercial exportation of live pythons by the early 1980's, but in the late 1980's, Indonesia began exporting pythons, and blood pythons from Sumatra were among the first species to be exported from there, which similarly, originated from the skin trade. These Sumatran specimens were also noted to have better temperaments than their Malaysian counterparts, despite being the same species.

By the 1990's, blood and short-tailed pythons began to become more readily available as captive-born animals. For several decades, these snakes retained their bad reputations derived from irascible wild-collected and imported animals, particularly those of Malaysian origin; however, captive-bred individuals have become more well-acclimated to captivity over more recent years. Today, blood and short-tailed pythons have increasingly been produced in a number of different color and pattern morphs and mutations. The majority of imports that are still available today, however, originate from gravid, wild-collected or "farmed" specimens from Indonesia.

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Blood and short tailed pythons range from 8 to 12 inches as hatchlings, and typically 4 to 7 feet, or 48 to 84 inches as most adults depending on the species.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial.*** Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Hatchling blood and short tailed pythons can be started out in a 15 to 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. Blood and short tailed pythons can be maintained on a substrate of 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. Blood and short tailed 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 hidebox, artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, logs, and other cage furnishings can also provide additional hiding and basking opportunities. Blood and short tailed pythons are primarily terrestrial, and 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 blood and short tailed pythons range from 75 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and 85 to 92 degrees F on the warm side. Some other sources have also found that these species may thrive at lower temperatures of 80 to 85 degrees F, and an overnight low temperature of 75 to 80 degrees F. 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. Blood and short tailed pythons should be maintained at relatively moderate to high relative humidity levels, which may range from about at least 60 to 70%, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Carnivorous;*** In the wild, blood and short tailed 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, blood and short tailed pythons can be given feeder rabbits or rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. 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 blood pythons may initially be nervous and defensive. They may hiss and strike to what they perceive to be a threat. These snakes often respond well to gentle and deliberate handling, but do not drop or injure the animal. Blood pythons have held an undeserved reputation for being "nasty" and difficult to keep, but this is based mostly on wild caught and/or imported animals. Captive bred animals that are becoming increasingly well established in the industry can make for very personable and rewarding pythons to keep for the intermediate hobbyist. Some can still be cantankerous or sketchy in their temperaments, however, depending on the individual. They are very heavy bodied snakes, which must be supported properly when being handled so as to prevent injuring them.

**\*\*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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