



\*Photo Credit: Perth Zoo

## Olive Python (*Liasis olivaceus*)

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### Large Australian Ambassadors

The olive python is a medium sized to large, semi-arboreal to terrestrial species of python indigenous to northern Australia and New Guinea. A medium to large species, the olive python's ground color ranges from a uniform light to dark brown, olive brown, to reddish or reddish brown with a white to cream colored ventral surface (or underbelly). They earn this common name from their uniform olive-brown to olive-yellow coloration. As with many python species, olive pythons are ambush predators of small to large mammals, birds, and reptiles, where they seek refuge in burrows, caves, or rocky crevices. They also possess several rows of heat sensitive labial pits along their upper jaws and labial scales, enabling them to gather and detect infrared images of endothermic prey even in low light conditions or total darkness. Olive pythons are the second largest recorded Australian python species after the Scrub, or Amethystine python (*Morelia amethystina*). Olive pythons are an attractive, active, and alert mid-sized python species that is gaining popularity in the herpetocultural hobby and industry among intermediate enthusiasts, with even albinos and other captive produced color morphs and mutations having been produced in recent years.

### 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:** *Liasis*

**Species:** *Liasis olivaceus*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, olive pythons can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more in captivity. Up to 35 to 40 years is not uncommon.

### Distribution and Habitat

The olive python is a medium sized to large, terrestrial to semi-arboreal species of Indo-Australia python indigenous to northern Australia. More specifically, this species of python occurs from northern to northeastern Western Australia, through the northern portions of the Northern Territory, and coastal northern to northwestern Queensland. Within this range, olive pythons occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-arboreal environments, including semi-arid to dry, tropical mountainous areas, grasslands, dry savannahs, and open, dry woodlands and forests, where they especially favor rocky habitats such as gorges, cliff walls and faces, and caves most often near water sources or wetlands. Olive pythons will also seek refuge in rocky crevices and outcroppings, and occasionally in burrows, hollowed logs, and other forms of cover as well, but less frequently.

### **Origin/History**

*Liasis olivaceus* Gray, 1842.

Captive breeding of the Olive Python has been reported by Christian, 1978, Moran, 1988, Ross and Marzec, 1990, and Barker and Barker, 1994. These reports are from *L. o. olivaceus*, the commonly kept form of the Olive Python (Neil Sonnemann 2023). It is not known as to when exactly olive pythons were first imported into the U.S., although Australia would generally prohibit exportation of all of its native herpetofauna and other wildlife in the mid-1970's. It is possible that olive pythons, as with many other Australian species, were descendants of unlawfully exported stock out of Australia, or may have been based from founding stock exported to other countries.

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

### **Size**

Olive pythons range from 12 to 15 inches as hatchlings. Adult olive pythons can become medium to large pythons ranging from 6 to 9 feet on average, or 72 to 108 inches, although larger sizes up to 12 feet, or 144 inches have been reported.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Arboreal.*** Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Hatchling olive 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. Olive 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. Olive 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. Olive 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 olive pythons range from 75 to 82 degrees F on the cool

side and 86 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. Olive pythons should be maintained at relatively moderate to high relative humidity levels, which may range from about 50 to 70%, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

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

***Carnivorous;*** In the wild, olive 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, olive pythons can be given feeder 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 olive pythons are often initially more nervous and nippy. It is important to always handle your olive python gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Olive pythons can become docile, attractive, inquisitive, and handle able species, but many possess very strong feeding responses (particularly when initially entering or opening an enclosure), and thus some level of care should be exercised when keeping or handling this species. Olive pythons can be excellent snakes to maintain, but are not for the beginner due to their potential adult size and feeding responses.

**\*\*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:

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