



\*Photo Credit: SFB Exotics

## Reticulated Pythons (*Malayopython reticulatus*)-Dwarf/Super Dwarf

### Localities

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#### **Dwarf and Super Dwarf Options for More Pet Keepers?**

Reticulated pythons are a large, but relatively slender bodied species of terrestrial to semi-arboreal python named for their light colored geometric “reticulate” pattern bordered in black on a silver, yellowish, to gray background. Reticulated pythons, or at least their mainland counterpart localities, are also known for being longest known species of snake in the world, with some anecdotal records of them nearing 28 feet (although these sizes are highly unusual). As with most other constrictor species, reticulated pythons are largely sedentary ambush predators of small to large mammals, birds, and reptiles, although they are still more active, alert, intelligent, and perceptive than most other large snake species. Reticulated pythons have long had an undeserved negative reputation for being aggressive and poorly suited for captivity, although this has now changed to a large degree as they are now being bred and produced in captivity with regularity.

There are also now even dwarf and super dwarf localities becoming more readily available from several southeastern Asian island localities as well that, at least oftentimes, remain more manageable options for reticulated pythons than their mainland counterparts that have become more increasingly popular in recent years. Reticulated pythons and other large constrictor species may also be a controlled, regulated, or prohibited species in some states. Always check any applicable federal, state, and local laws and ordinances that may pertain to the specific possession of this species. While these snakes certainly are not for everyone, with the correct level of knowledge and experience, can make for an undisputed and rewarding species to work with in captivity, particularly as many more color and pattern morphs become available, including tiger, albino, pied/pie-bald, golden child, sunfire, and many others become available.

#### **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:** Malayopython

**Species:** *Malayopython reticulatus*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, reticulated pythons can attain longevity of at least 20 to 25 years or more. Up to 35 to 40 years is also not uncommon.

### **Distribution and Habitat, What Exactly Are “Dwarf” and “Super Dwarf” Reticulated Pythons?**

Dwarf and super dwarf reticulated pythons are races of reticulated pythons occurring on several islands within the Lesser Sundas Islands chain off of the southern to southwestern coast of Indonesia, for which several different localities of dwarf and super dwarf reticulated pythons are so-named after. They are not their own species, or even subspecies or “morphs”, but rather examples of insular dwarfism, where organisms isolated on islands or island changes, over time and evolution, have become much smaller than their mainland counterparts. These islands, and localities thereof include the following, and also may include some size differences and variations between adult animals as well: Selayar (9 to 13 feet), Jampea (8 to 12 feet), Kayuadi (7 to 11 feet), Tombolongan (6 to 10 feet), Madu (6 to 9 feet), Kalatoa (6 to 9 feet), and Karompa (5 to 7 feet).

Within this range, reticulated pythons occupy primarily in terrestrial, to semi-arboreal and semi-aquatic environments, and can be a common and widespread species of python over much of their range. Reticulated pythons can occur from tropical to sub-tropical rainforests, and other humid, tropical forests and woodlands, to marshes and swamplands, tropical grasslands and savannahs, to agricultural and cultivated areas, and suburban areas near human habitations. These species of pythons are most often found in these habitats when they are near wetlands and other water sources, such as rivers, streams, lakes, irrigated croplands, and marshes or swamplands.

### **Origin/History**

*Malayopython reticulatus* (Schneider, 1801); *M. r. jampeanus* Auliya et al., 2002; *M. r. saputrai* Auliya et al., 2002.

Jampea dwarf and “super-dwarf” reticulated pythons first became appeared and became known in the pet trade and herpetoculture sometime during the early 2000’s. Unfortunately, there was not any reliable documentation as to whom or where exactly these snakes were initially imported from, and it was left to others to perform the guesswork through word of mouth. The original locality of exportation had either been lost or was undisclosed; however, it was surmised that the islands of Kaloatoa, Madu, Karumpa were the most likely sources of origin that these snakes originated from. Prior to these early 2000’s, the majority of “retics” that were available and imported were of the much larger mainland localities, which limited the reticulated python’s suitability as a pet species for all but a very few. Now, however, with the more ready availability of these dwarf and super-dwarf localities of reticulated pythons, the trend began which made these much smaller reticulated pythons much more accessible and manageable for a wider market and array of pet reptile keepers.

Unfortunately, however, all reticulated pythons (with no exceptions for these dwarf and super-

dwarf localities) were listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as injurious species under the Lacey Act in March of 2015, thereby prohibiting their importation into the U.S. As such, no new localities or lineages of these snakes could be legally acquired, and only captive-bred snakes in of the lineages already available in the U.S. became available.

### **Experience Level Required (Dwarf/Super Dwarf Localities)**

***Intermediate/Moderate*** (for Dwarf and Super Dwarf localities).

### **Size (Dwarf/Super Dwarf Localities)**

Reticulated pythons range from 18 to 24 inches as hatchlings. Males are dimorphic, and are usually slightly smaller than females. Some dwarf localities are also known to remain at smaller sizes. Dwarf reticulated pythons typically range from 9 to 13 feet, or 108 to 156 inches, while some super dwarf localities only reach 6 to 7 feet, or 72 to 84 inches as adults.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Arboreal.***

***For Dwarf/Super Dwarf Localities:*** Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Hatchling reticulated pythons can be started out in a 40 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 foot by 2 foot to 6 foot by 2 foot enclosure or similarly sized enclosure is required for even these dwarf or super dwarf localities. Reticulated pythons can be maintained on a substrate of cage liner material, cypress mulch, sphagnum moss, 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. Reticulated 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. Reticulated pythons are also semi-arboreal, and some amount of height and climbing space is just as important as floor space.

### **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 reticulated 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. Reticulated pythons should be maintained at relatively moderate to slightly high relative humidity levels, which may range from about 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, reticulated pythons are carnivorous, and will prey upon a wide range of small to large mammals, birds, and other reptiles that they can ambush and consume. In

captivity, reticulated pythons can be given feeder rodents or rabbits 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 reticulated pythons are often initially more nervous and defensive. They may gape and hiss, and attempt to bite what they perceive to be a threat or a predator. Handle them gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Reticulated pythons have held a negative reputation for being nasty and difficult to handle, although this is based largely on initial imports, and a growth in captive breeding has produced far more traceable and workable animals. Given regular handling and interaction, retics can make for very rewarding animals to keep for the right individuals, although the dwarf and super dwarf localities are also often said to be somewhat more nervous and flighty, or at least faster moving and active than their mainland counterparts.

**\*\*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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