



*Photo Credit: Chien C. Lee

Reticulated Pythons (*Malayopython reticulatus*)-Mainland Localities

The King of Constrictors

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 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 large 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.

So what are “Mainland” Reticulated pythons? In this case, “mainland” simply refers to any population or locality of reticulated pythons occurring on the continental mainland of Asia, and which are typically known for reaching much larger sizes more commonly associated with reticulated pythons than some of the dwarf or super dwarf localities. 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. Reticulated pythons and other large constrictor species are also 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**

Subspecies: *Malayopython reticulatus 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

Reticulated pythons are a large species of terrestrial, to semi arboreal and semi-aquatic python indigenous to southern and southeastern Asia. They are a very widespread and common species of python over much of their range, and more specifically, occur from the Nicobar Islands, through India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, to Malaysia, and Singapore. Furthermore, these pythons occur east through Indonesia and the Indo-Australian Archipelago, including Sumatra, Borneo, and other islands and localities, as well as throughout the Philippines. 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).

Reticulated pythons have been widely kept and bred in herpetoculture for several decades, as far back as at least the 1960's and 1970's. Many of the first reticulated pythons, or "retics" as they are known, were first imported from Thailand in particular during this time. For some time, reticulated pythons had earned a bad reputation as giant, "nasty", and "unhandleable" snakes, which might certainly have been true of wild-collected imported specimens. However, in 1994, U.S. python breeder Bob Clark obtained the first albino or amelanistic reticulated python in April of 1994. Living up to the retic's negative reputation, this particular specimen did not adjust to captivity well, as it was said to be extremely aggressive, and refused to feed voluntarily for almost 2 years before being able to be bred a few years later. During the late 1990's, 2 other strains of albino were also imported from Malaysia as well.

Prior to 1992, there were no widespread genetic morphs or mutations of reticulated pythons, but in this year, the first "tiger" retic, now known to be a co-dominant trait, was first bred in captivity by Karl Hermann, then of St. Paul, Minnesota. These "tiger" retics were some of the first retics to be produced in captivity, and were better natured and acclimated to captivity. Through these continued breedings, even more morphs of retics became available such as "super tiger" (which were homozygous for the tiger mutation), and others. Other notable reticulated python morphs which were imported during the 1990's from Asia, namely Indonesia and Malaysia, included the "Calico" and Striped.

During the 2010's, increased media attention of the well-documented issue of invasive Burmese pythons in southern Florida prompted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to add the Burmese python, as well as Reticulated python and 7 other boa and python species to the injurious wildlife listing of the Lacey Act, thereby prohibiting their importation and interstate transport. Reticulated

pythons were added to the Lacey Act in March of 2015. The United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK) then filed a federal lawsuit against USFWS stating USFWS and the Lacey Act did not have the authority to regulate interstate movement within the continental U.S. of these listed species. In April of 2017, the U.S. Court of Appeals agreed with USARK's lawsuit and removed the inter-state prohibition of these animals, although they would still be prohibited from being imported into the U.S.

During this same time, some level of controversy arose over the unsustainable overproduction of reticulated pythons in herpetoculture and the pet trade with regards to their suitability for all but a very few general pet keepers, at least when it came to the mainland localities of these giant snakes, although this could have also perhaps been attributed to the species' uncertain future regarding the Lacey Act amendments during the years leading up to their listing. In about the early to mid-2000's, dwarf and "super-dwarf" localities of reticulated pythons became more widely known and available, and a trend began towards these smaller dwarf, or insular varieties as smaller and more suitable retics which could be managed by a wider array of reptile enthusiasts and pet owners.

Experience Level Required (For Mainland Localities)

Advanced (for Mainland localities).

Size (Mainland Localities)

Reticulated pythons range from 18 to 24 inches as hatchlings. As adults, mainland localities can range in size from 12 to 23 feet on average for adults, or 144 to 276 inches depending on their sex, age, and overall husbandry and growth rates. Males are dimorphic, and are usually slightly smaller than females. **Always be sure to consider the potential adult size and long term commitment of keeping and housing a reticulated python or any other large snake prior to obtaining one as part of being a responsible reptile or other pet owner!**

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Arboreal.

For Mainland 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, at a very minimum, an eight foot by three foot enclosure or larger, or room sized/walk-in enclosure is required for these very large localities of snakes. 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. Larger feeder or prey items for exceptionally large pythons can include prey items such as large rabbits, and even poultry, pigs, and other pre-killed livestock, which can also often be obtained through alternative means through local wholesalers, meat, or agricultural suppliers in one's area. 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 they do often tend to be a more active and flighty large constrictor species than Burmese pythons for example.

Also remember to practice safe handling with any of the large constrictors by never placing or allowing a larger snake around the neck when handling a reticulated python and **please follow safe and common sense handling practices when keeping or working with these large snakes.**

****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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