



*Photo Credit: Urban Tropics

White Lipped Python (*Leiopython/Bothrochilus albertisii*)

White Lipped Iridescence

White lipped pythons are a medium sized species of python that are also known as the D'Albert's python, or D'Albert's water python. The white lipped pythons are a medium sized, moderately built group of species with a uniformly colored, iridescent scalation of dark brown, blackish, to chestnut golden-brown. These species undergo an ontogenetic color change as they mature, and are often a dark olive gray or brownish gray with darker markings along their lateral surface. These species also have a characteristic black or dark colored anterior portion of their head, and black and white barred labial scales, giving them their common name. Up to six species, and several subspecies thereof of White Lipped pythons are described, although some of these taxonomic changes are considered questionable. These include *B. albertisii*, *B. fredparkeri*, *B. huonensis*, *B. biakensis*, *B. montanus*, and *B. meridionalis*. As with most pythons, white lipped 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 well.

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: *Leiopython/Bothrochilus*

Species: *Leiopython/Bothrochilus albertisii**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, white lipped 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

White lipped pythons are a unique species of medium sized, terrestrial to semi-arboreal Indo-Australian pythons indigenous to most of Papua New Guinea. More precise localities are

dependent upon the subspecies and locality, but these pythons occur more specifically in Papua New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, and its surrounding islands, Indonesia, including New Guinea and Irian Jaya, and coastal northern Australia, including northern Queensland and the islands of Torres Strait. Within this range, white lipped pythons occupy a variety of primarily terrestrial to semi-arboreal environments, including tropical to sub-tropical rainforests and other tropical forests and woodlands, to more open woodlands and savannahs, agricultural and cultivated area, plantations, and residential or suburban areas near areas of human habitation. White lipped pythons especially favor these habitats when ample, humid ground and low canopy cover is available, and when these habitats are located within close proximity to permanent to semi-permanent wetlands and other bodies of water, including lakes, rivers and streams, riverine or stream basins, irrigated croplands or cultivated areas, marshes, and forested swamplands.

Origin/History

Leiopython albertisii (W. Peters & Doria, 1878).

White-lipped pythons (Genus *Leiopython*) have been collected from the wild in Indonesian New Guinea and exported for the pet trade since at least 1977. Despite their long duration of trade and recent taxonomic work recognizing six different species, virtually nothing is known of the trade dynamics or ecology of these species (Daniel Natusch Jessica A. Lyons 2012).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

White lipped pythons range from about 15 to 20 inches as hatchlings. Most adult white lipped pythons average between 6 and 9 feet, or 72 to 108 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Arboreal. Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Hatchling white lipped 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. White lipped 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. White lipped 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. White lipped 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 white lipped 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. White lipped pythons should be maintained at relatively moderate to high relative humidity levels, which may range from about 60 to 80%, which may vary somewhat on the species and subspecies, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, white lipped 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, white lipped 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 white lipped 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. White lipped pythons have a negative reputation for being defensive, or otherwise prone to biting. However, if they are handled and worked with regularly, they can settle down considerably and can make for very active and attractive species to maintain. White lipped pythons are also often said to be "vocal" snakes in that they will make short hisses when handled. This behavior is usually not aggressive or defensive in nature, but is rather often believed to be either a form of communication used by these snakes, or simply a result of uneven pressure being applied when not adequately supported during handling (which is also the case with many other species as well). Interestingly, the southern, or "black" white lipped python locality is often said to be much more docile, easy going, and reluctant to bite or strike. Another captive husbandry note of interest is this species' tendency to occasionally regurgitate "hairballs". This is believed to be a natural feeding and digestive behavior for this species, and is not to be seen as a cause for concern. White lipped pythons are not the most suitable python for beginners due to their potential adult size, disposition, and strong feeding response, but for the adequately experienced and prepared intermediate to advanced reptile keeper, these pythons often make fine 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

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:

Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com

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