



*Ryan McVeigh

Woma Python *(Aspidites ramsayi)*

Pitless and Colubrid-Like

Woma pythons, or simply womas, are a medium sized, moderately built species of python with a ground color consisting of light brown, yellowish, to tan or cream color with darker brown or reddish brown cross bands. The head is yellowish to orange-yellow, with darker markings above the brows of each eye. These active, diurnal to crepuscular pythons can be voracious predators of small mammals, birds, and smaller reptiles and amphibians, often subduing them either by constriction, or simply compression against the walls of a burrow. This genus of pythons to which womas belong to, Aspidities (which translates to shield bearer), is further unique among pythons in that heat sensitive labial pits found on most other boas and pythons are lacking. Womas are an invigorating and uniquely sought after species that make for great, less commonly seen additions for nearly any pet owner or enthusiast.

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: Aspidites

Species: *Aspidites ramsayi**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, womas can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more in captivity. Up to 35 to 40 years is also known.

Distribution and Habitat

Woma pythons are a medium sized, terrestrial species of python indigenous to the arid to semi-arid desert and scrubland regions of central and southwestern Australia. Within this range, they occur in Western Australia to the southern Northern Territory, northern South Australia, to southern Queensland and southwestern New South Wales. Within this range, woma pythons

occupy primarily terrestrial environments, including a variety of warm, arid to semi-arid habitats, from dry, sclerophyll forests to other open, dry forests and woodlands, grasslands, to sparsely vegetated deserts, scrublands, dune areas, and savannahs. Woma pythons especially favor these above habitats when ample access to retreats and cover are available in the form of burrows, rock crevices and rocky outcroppings, tree hollows and cavities, hollowed logs, to other areas of dense shrubs and other vegetation and ground cover.

Origin/History

Aspidites ramsayi (Macleay, 1882).

The exact timeline for when woma pythons were first kept or imported is not specified. In general, Australia would prohibit exportation of all of its indigenous wildlife by the mid-1970's. Any imports which occurred after this would have technically not been legal imports, as would be the case with many other popular Australian species in herpetoculture. Womas would become readily established and captive-born in U.S herpetoculture by the late 1990's after being imported from founding groups from Germany and other European nations.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Woma pythons range from 8 to 12 inches as hatchlings, and 5 to 7 feet, or 54 to 84 inches) as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Hatchling womas 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. Womas can be maintained on a substrate of fine aspen shavings, 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. Womas 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. Womas 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 woma 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. Woma pythons should be

maintained at relatively moderate to somewhat high relative humidity levels, which may range from about 55 to 70%, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, woma 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, woma 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 womas may initially be nervous and defensive. They musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your woma gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Many womas will become docile, personable, and more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older and can make for impressive display specimens. However, this genus of pythons often exhibits a strong and motivated feeding response, which can be mistaken for aggression or defensiveness. This is a species that should be handled carefully to prevent a feeding related bite or cases of mistaken identity.

****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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Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. We cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety.

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