

Ball Python Care Sheet



Scientific Name: Python regius

Common Name: Ball Python, AKA Royal Python

Where are they found? West and central Africa from Senegal to Uganda, northern Sudan and Ethiopia.

Natural Habitat: Dry brush, cleared forest, open grasslands, savanna.

Description: Very thick bodied snake, about twice as thick as other pythons of the same length. Small head and very short tail. Heat sensing pits on the face between nose and mouth.

Vocalization: None

Size: Adults up to 5 ft, most about 4 ft. Hatchlings are about 12-18 inches long.

Life Expectancy: 20-30 years. Record is 47 years.

Color: Chocolate brown ground color with cream colored blotches on the sides. Thin yellow strip from nose to neck. White belly. Many captive color and pattern morphs.

Diet in the wild: Gerbils, rats, mice and other small rodents.

Do they make good pets? Captive bred animals make an excellent choice, but wild caught sometimes make poor pets (usually have external parasites also).

Housing: Glass aquariums are not a good choice for ball pythons. It is very difficult to get the correct humidity. 40" x 32" x24" is a good size cage. The cages with the sliding glass door in the front and mesh on the sides work really well.

Temperature: 80-90° F day and 70-80° F night. Need an under tank heat source. We do not recommend the use of hot rocks as they can get too hot and burn the animal.

Humidity: The recommended humidity is 60%-70%. If it gets too dry they may have shedding problems and will soak in their water bowl. Don't keep the whole cage moist as you can have problems with mildew. Keep sections of the cage or hide boxes that have moisture, like moist sphagnum moss.

Lighting: 14 hours of light during the summer and 10 hours of light during the winter. You may have a basking light, however ball pythons are nocturnal and don't come out to bask very often.

Furniture: Hide box, water bowl large enough for soaking, branches (they don't usually bask, but love to climb at night).

Substrate: Cypress mulch works really well, but you can also use newspaper, aspen, pine, long grain sphagnum moss or astro turf (cut off any loose threads that may be ingested).

Diet: Rodents (most will eat pre-killed). Adults can eat an adult rat. Some prefer bird. You can scent rodents with chicks (by rubbing the rodent on a frozen chick), then try feeding the rodent to the snake. That will usually convert them to eating rodents. We recommend pre-killed prey to avoid injuries to your snake. Sometimes you may have to jiggle the rodent with tongs in order to make it appear to be moving. Remember, different species of rodents have very different smells, like mice, rats and gerbils. Your snake may prefer one over the others.

How Often: Weekly

Breeding in captivity? Yes. Start laying eggs in mid-February and begin hatching mid-April.

Mating rituals in the wild: Usually lay 4-5 eggs per clutch. Mothers incubate the eggs by wrapping around them and "shivering" every few

seconds which causes friction and keeps the eggs warm.

Fun Facts:

- Always wash your hands after handling any reptile.
- Ball Pythons are very popular pets. There are many exciting color and pattern morphs available in the pet trade. These colors range from albinos, piebald, jungle, ghost, etc. Some can cost up to \$10,000 or more per snake! Basic captive bred ball python babies are usually in the \$50 range.
- Most pet shop ball pythons are wild caught. Some of the animals do well, some do not.
- These snakes can be picky eaters. Ball pythons won't eat unless they are completely hydrated. Sometimes ball pythons will refuse food for several weeks at a time. As long as your snake is acting normally and not losing weight, don't worry. If you see changes in feces (color, odor or consistency) take him to a veterinarian for a fecal. If you have feeding problems, try different types of rodents.
- They are nocturnal and hide in unused burrows during the day in the wild. Leave burrows during rains or right after rains. When they return they leave a smooth mark on the ground. These marks make them easier to find. Sometimes many snakes will stay together in one burrow.
- Africa exports tens of thousands of ball pythons per year.
- When they go into a defensive posture, they may roll up into a ball which is how they get the name "ball" python.
- They are regularly killed for their skins in Africa. They are also used as food there.
- The heat sensing pits can detect a .026°C temperature change.
- Ball pythons' bellies turn pinkish prior to shedding. That is a good indicator for you and they usually will not eat when they are ready to shed.
- If they are healthy, they can be kept in large community cages. They must be separated for feeding.
- Health Problems: Do not overfeed your ball python. They can get obese and that leads to other health problems. You should do an annual fecal to check for parasites, especially with wild caught specimens. Some ball pythons, especially if they are not kept humid enough, will retain eye caps when shedding. Their eyes will appear

wrinkled. Look for eye caps in the shed of your snake to make sure it comes off. Sometimes their eyes look wrinkled even if they have shed the eye cap. Be very careful with their eyes, you can easily damage the cornea. Unshed eye caps can be removed by wetting a Q-tip with warm water and gently moving the Q-tip around the eye. Don't put pressure on the eye itself. An edge of a piece of skin should come loose and you can slide the eye cap right off. If you can't do it, take your snake to a qualified veterinarian to have it removed. If layers of eye shed accumulate, your snake could have serious eye damage.
