Common Name: Ball Python, Royal Python

Scientific Name: Python regius

Lifespan

- Roughly 20 – 30 years; captive record ~47 years

Size

- 3 – 4 ft for males; 4 – 6 ft for females, both sexes have a stocky build

Distribution

- Sub-Saharan Africa (narrow strip of central and west central Africa)

Habitat

- Grassland, savanna, open woodland. Frequently shelters in termite mounds and mammal burrows

Habits

- Frequently shelters in termite mounds and mammal burrows, both of which provide humidity
- Harmless, most are very docile
- Primarily nocturnal
- May aestivate. In addition, males often fast during the breeding season, and females may fast during egg brooding.

Diet

- Rodents, birds, and birds’ eggs; subdues prey by constriction
- Rodents include African soft-furred rats, gerbils, shrews, and striped mice.
- Juveniles and males may consume primarily nestling and immature birds

By Jeff LeClere
Captive Care

Housing

• 36 X 18 X 12 or equivalent area for adults. Young snakes 10 or 20 gallon tank or equivalent area
• Secure, tight-fitting lid or door is necessary
• Substrate can be newspaper, cypress mulch, orchid bark, aspen shavings, reptile carpet, tile or slate, *avoid cedar chips, gravel or sand!*
• Sturdy water dish – water must be available at all times
• Two hide boxes (warm side, cool side)
• Humidity box filled with moist sphagnum moss or paper towels etc. for security and humidity

Temperature and Lighting

• Ambient cage temperature 75 F, with “hot area” of 85 to 95+ F. Provide heat gradient
• “Hot area” can be achieved by using radiant heat, heat pad on outside of cage, or both
• Lighting not necessary, heat can be achieved by heat pads only
• However, lighting can be dome lamp with incandescent bulbs for heat as well - 12 hr cycle
• UVB lighting beneficial, but not necessary
• Thermometer (temp gun or probe) to measure actual temperature is a necessity
• Adjustable temperature heat pads, thermostat and/or rheostats for any heat source is beneficial

Diet

• Carnivore only, needs whole animal prey
• Frozen/thawed rats of appropriate size, mice OK, whole prey cased links as alternative*
• Feed once a week especially for juveniles, twice or once a month of a larger prey size for adults is OK, and may even be preferred
• Avoid feeding live prey
• Supplemental vitamins and minerals generally not necessary

Special Notes

• Called ball python for its defense mechanism of hiding its head within its coils
• Called royal python (= *regius*) as African rulers would wear this python (alive) as jewelry
• Fasting/refusal of food for a few months out of the year is common in both sexes. Watch the snake’s weight – if the snake begins to lose weight, it needs to be investigated
• Improper shedding and/or retained eye caps due to low/improper humidity is a common problem
• Widely bred in captivity; over 5,000 different captive produced color morphs known; mostly we get wild type coloration coming in for adoption rather than morphs
• Morphs don’t typically cause visible problems, but some do, e.g. spider morph “wobble”