



# Ball Python

## Natural History

**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





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## 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”

