



Antaresia Species (Stimson's, Children's, Spotted and Pygmy Pythons)

The Antaresia genus contains a number of the most commonly kept pythons in Australia. They are naturally found in many different parts of Australia and although each have some differences in their recommended husbandry the following general guidelines can be applied.

Housing

Pythons are best housed separately, except when breeding. Hatchlings can be kept in small lunch box size tubs providing a number of suitable hides, a clean fresh water source, appropriate heating and a climbing branch are provided. Sub-adult or adult pythons can be adequately housed indoors in a ventilated vivarium.

Enclosures must be secure and escape proof. The vivarium must be adequately ventilated and any build-up of condensation could indicate damp conditions, poor ventilation or both. Appropriate measures should be undertaken to avoid such conditions as they can predispose to a wide range of medical problems.

Captive Environment

Vivarium furnishings should be kept simple, with no sharp edges or points, and include strong climbing branches and a number of appropriate hide boxes. These should be constructed so you can access the snake at any time. Try not to clutter up the vivarium to allow plenty of room for the snake to move around and exercise.

The floor covering or substrate should be easily removable for cleaning. Some options are newspaper, paper towel, recycled paper cat litter, sand, woodchips and indoor-outdoor carpet.





The cage and substrate should be cleaned regularly with 'spot' cleaning as required. Any items in the cage should be cleaned with a safe product such as diluted F10 (recommendation a 1:250 ratio with water).

A number of hide boxes or rock crevices should be provided to allow the snake to retreat and to also thermoregulate their own temperature at different points of the cage. Avoid use of adhesive tape inside the vivarium, as this can come loose and pose a risk to the snake.

Temperature and Lighting

Pythons like to bask beneath a spotlight or radiant heat panel for several hours each day, however a heat pad or cable on or under a small section of the floor will allow ongoing access to a constant heat source. It is crucial that the snake is unable to wrap themselves around or have any direct physical contact with the heat source as this can lead to life-threatening thermal burns.



Generally, the heat and light source should be switched on, usually by means of a timer switch, for around 12 hours per day during the summer months with the photoperiod (the time the light is on) reduced to 10 hours during the winter months. The ambient temperature at the warm end of the cage at night should not be allowed to drop lower than 20C for any extended period. With hatching pythons (<1 year), a heat source should be provided 24 hours per day in order to ensure ideal growth and general health.

The heat source needs to be positioned at one end of the vivarium, creating a gradient of temperatures so that the snake can maintain a preferred body temperature by moving backwards and forwards around the cage. The basking spot should reach about 33–38°C and the opposite end of the vivarium should be about 16–20°C. Hatchlings (< 1 year) are best kept to less of a gradient (around 25°C–34°C is generally appropriate).





Water

Fresh clean water should be provided at all times in a solid non-spillable container and changed regularly.

Food

Antaresia species will eat mice or rats of an appropriate size in relation to their own body size. Young pythons will become very active when hungry and require feeding every 7 – 10 days. Adults will often be ready to feed immediately after defecation. Frozen food items must be completely thawed before they are offered, this can be achieved by slowly warming them in a container filled with warm water.

Most adults should be fed every 1–3 weeks; many snakes will continue to eat any food source that is offered hence it is important to be observant as some individuals may become obese. \

Adult snakes may feed regularly for several months and then abstain from eating for long periods, occasionally for as long as six months. If the snake is reluctant to take food off the floor, offer it held in tongs. Remember, they are low energy specialists spending most of their time doing nothing apart from basking. Avoid feeding if the snake

has not been kept warm (ie during the winter months) or if sufficient heat is not available after feeding, as the food may decompose and start rotting in the stomach before it can be digested, resulting in regurgitation, gastrointestinal disease or even the death of your snake.

Captive Behaviour/Breeding

Young pythons may be nervous and bite. Most will settle with time and tolerate handling. Never grip the snake and restrict its movement during handling as it will become alarmed. Do not handle a snake for several days after it has eaten, nor when in pre-slough condition – that is from commencement of the "milky" eyes until it has shed its skin. Probing by an experienced reptile vet can determine the sex of your snake and should not be attempted by those unexperienced as if done inappropriately serious damage can occur.





Female pythons usually grow slightly longer and heavier than males however the adult size often relates directly to their food intake and feeding regularity hence some males can be larger than females.

Breeding success is improved by allowing a drop in the night time low temperatures in both sexes for 6–8 weeks during the winter months. Mating occurs in during the winter period with eggs being deposited in late spring or early summer. Adult males should not be kept together during the breeding season as they are likely to fight and may cause injury to themselves.

Health Problems

Reptiles in general are very good at hiding their health problems until they have become very serious, for this reason it is very important that you get the python checked up by an experienced reptile veterinarian every 6–12 months.

Common problems where veterinary advice is recommended are wheezing, dysecdysis (trouble shedding), prolonged inappetence outside of the cooler months of the year, lethargy, diarrhoea, abnormal movement and regurgitation.

Quarantine

The length of quarantine is a contentious area with many different protocols implemented across the world. With the recent advancements in our understanding of reptile viruses and diseases it now appears that we may not be able to ‘out-quarantine’ some of the newly discovered reptile viruses which makes recommended a time–frame complicated. Most reptile veterinarians now recommend a quarantine period of at least 6 months for newly acquired snakes. Quarantined animals should be kept in a separate room with no shared contact or airspace. Any handling, feeding or cleaning of the cages should be completed last after all the other non-quarantined animals. If further work needs to be done with the rest of the collection after the animals in quarantine then a complete change of clothes and a thorough disinfection of hands and any equipment used is recommended.

