

Python Care

Australia has a vast array of native pythons, each adapted to their own habitat. Equally, each of these interesting and beautiful creatures have different captive requirements. In this care sheet we will explain a few of the basic requirements that apply to captive husbandry of the more commonly kept Australian python species. More specialized species and venomous snakes are not discussed here.

Housing

As with any captive reptile, the golden rule is an enclosure that allows the python to behave as it would in the wild. A sound understanding of your species of python's natural habitat is needed for design of the enclosure. Carpet pythons, Diamond pythons and scrub pythons are arboreal, meaning they live in trees and love to climb thus they should be provided in a taller enclosure with plenty of branches for climbing. Children's pythons, Olive pythons and Black-headed pythons are predominantly ground dwelling and therefore require an enclosure that is longer rather than taller. For all pythons there should be multiple hide areas provided in different areas of the cage. Hides can range from simple cardboard boxes to attractive artificial caves. As a general rule, for the arboreal species the enclosure should be at least half the length of the longest snake being housed and be tall enough to accommodate branches for climbing, usually the height is at least twice the length. For ground dwelling species you need an enclosure at least 120 cm long.

A shallow water bowl is required for soaking and drinking from, the water should be kept at the cool end of the cage and changed daily.

The enclosure should be cleaned and disinfected regularly. Newspaper is a cheap, effective and safe substrate to use. An alternative is recycled newspaper kitty litter, e.g. Breeders Choice. Except for breeding purposes, pythons are best housed individually – otherwise bite wounds and injuries will result – even cannibalism!

Lighting

The issue of Ultra Violet light (UV) in captive pythons is still a controversial one. Many keepers believe that UV supplementation is not necessary as Australian pythons are mainly nocturnal. We believe that the best practice is to provide UV exposure that mimics normal daylight and recommend that you do this. The best way to provide your python with the UV they need is with a fluorescent light. There are many types of fluorescent lights that are now being mar-



keted as full-spectrum (daylight). Make sure the light you use is specifically designed for reptile use. UV lights should be replaced every 12 months, even if they are still running, as their UV output diminishes to the point where they are no longer providing enough UV to maintain a healthy python.

Make sure there is no glass or perspex between the light and the python as it will filter out 99% of the UV getting to the python. Lights should be placed on a timer for at least 8-10 hours a day. For breeding, you may need to alter your day length with the seasons. Consider regular exposure to natural light, especially if you are not providing UV light in the enclosure, as there is no substitute for real sun.

Temperature / Heating

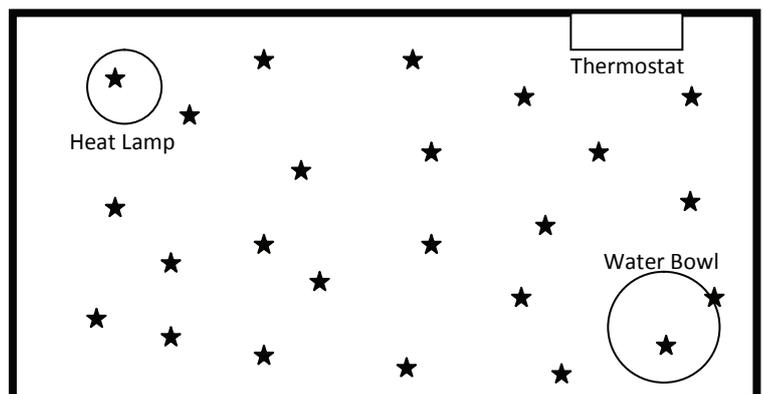
Reptiles cannot regulate their body temperature like mammals and rely on the environment to provide to warmth to maintain their body temperature at their Preferred Body Temperature (PBT)*. In order for you python to regulate its body temperature, there must be areas of the cage that allows your python to heat up beyond its PBT and cool down below its PBT. This is called Behavioural Thermoregulation

Thus there needs to be a hot end and a cool end of the enclosure, this variation in temperature across the cage is called the Thermal Gradient. The thermal Gradient is essential for a happy, healthy long life. The thermal gradient required will depend on the species (and often sub species) of python you are keeping. Children's pythons naturally occur in the central Australian desert, thus requiring a heat spot that reaches into the low 40°C's while a Brisbane Carpet Python requires a hot spot reaching 34 – 35 °C. Once again highlighting the need to have a detailed understanding of your python's natural habitat.

We strongly recommend plotting a temperature map for your enclosure to asses that it has a suitable thermal gradient. Take 10-30 temperatures from around the cage and plot them on a graph. You should get a graph that looks roughly like the one in the following images:

Map of the enclosure (Cage Floor)

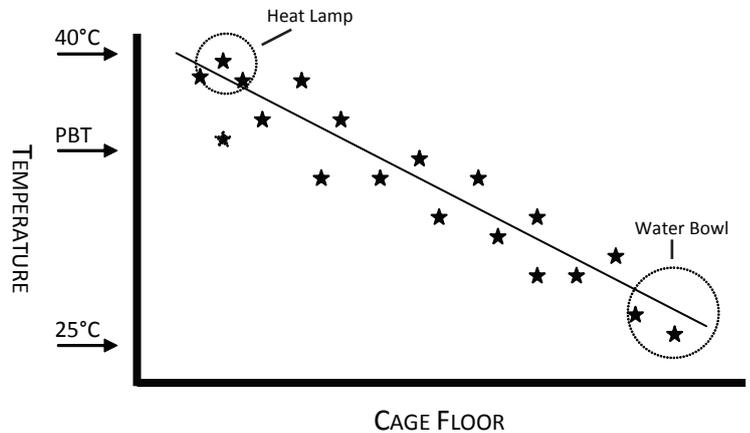
★ = Temperature Reading





Graph of the temperature readings

NB: All heating must be controlled by a thermostat placed in the cooler end of the cage



Feeding

Pythons are strict carnivores and require a diet of whole small animals. The recommended amount of food and frequency of feeding varies depending on the age and size of the snake. A hatchling should be fed no more frequently than weekly, where as a large adult should be fed no more frequently than once a month! Ideally every 6 – 8 weeks. The general aim is to feed 5 – 10 % of the snake's body weight at a time. A rough guide is to feed a meal that will create a slight bulge in the snake's stomach for a few days.

Due to the snake's low metabolic rate combined with limited activity and a tendency to over feed, OBESITY IS A VERY COMMON problem in captive snakes.

Disease Prevention

- It is very important to maintain a high standard of hygiene with regular cleaning.
- A sample of faeces should be presented yearly to your veterinarian for analysis for worms and other parasites.
- Avoid access to toxic plants and substrates that might be eaten such as sand or gravel.
- UV lights should be replaced every 6-12 months. Consider regular access to sunlight once or twice a week, but make sure your python is able to get out of the sun and cool down if it needs to, you don't want to cook it!



Is my Python sick?

A Python that is not well may show one or more of the following signs:

- Changes to the colour of the scales
- Listlessness/ Inactive
- Not eating/ refusing food
- Sore Inflamed Mouths
- Incomplete shedding
- Changes in faeces, loose or (extra) foul smell

Seek veterinary attention if you notice any of these signs.

Enjoy your Python!

*Preferred Body Temperature (PBT)

Type of snake	PBT (°C)
Children's Python	30 - 33
Carpet Python	29 - 33
Water Python	34
Diamond Python	29
Amethystine Python	33
Common Tree Python	32