



## **Common Name: Olive Python**

Scientific Name: *Liasis olivaceus* sp.

### **Biology and Behaviour**

Olives are found in rocky areas or gorges and especially rocky habitat associated with water courses. Olive Pythons, as with all pythons, are non – venomous snakes. Snakes grow by shedding their skin, about a week prior to the snake ‘sloughing’ its skin the eyes turn a milky white colour as the old skin separates from the new skin underneath. During this shedding period it is normal for your python to reject food. Olives make great and easy captives. They are low maintenance and have good personalities, it should be noted that Olive Pythons can grow up to 6m in length and will need to be housed appropriately. Olive pythons have a lifespan of 15 – 20 years.

### **Requirements**

You require a basic wildlife licence issued by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries

### **Housing**

Olive pythons are one of Australia’s largest python they are largest in girth but are beaten in length by the scrub python so for an adult you need a very large enclosure. A minimum size enclosure for a juvenile is 90cm (3 feet long ) x 60cm (2 feet high ) x 60cm (2 feet deep ). For an adult bigger the better In regards to enclosure size a minimum size enclosure should be but at least 180 cm (6 feet) long x 120 cm (4 feet high) and 60 cm (2 feet deep) crt. Have a good look at the dimensions and ventilation of commercial enclosures if you intend to build your own. Fish tanks are NOT recommended as glass loses heat too quickly, it has poor ventilation and heat from lighting may crack the glass. They are also difficult to secure and escapes are a hazard. Olive pythons are generally ground dwelling and can be encountered among rocks, pre existing burrows and other similar refuges, they are also partly arboreal, seeking food in trees. Rough surfaced rocks are a typical feature of most indoor python enclosures. They not only retain heat during the day, but also provide an ideal starting point for a python to shed its skin. The vivarium should be cleaned out at least once a week to help prevent disease and a suitable disinfectant used (such as F10).

### **Substrate**

Bark, synthetic grass, Aspen, newspaper or butchers paper are all good clean substrates.

### **Water**

Provide a water bowl large enough and deep enough for individuals to completely submerge in. Bathing is essential for shedding. Ensure water bowls are cleaned regularly - not only are they for bathing, they are also a source of drinking water.

## **Temperature and Lighting**

As pythons do not have internal means of keeping the body warm, they rely on external sources such as the sun or the radiating warmth from nearby rocks to reach their desired body temperature. Olive Pythons' body temperature is required in order to digest their food and remain active. The Olive pythons preferred body temperature is 25 - 30°C. The size of the enclosure will determine the wattage of the heat lamp used. As Olive pythons are mostly nocturnal, UV lighting is not required.

## **Feeding**

The Olive Pythons diet usually consists of mammals and birds. A range of frozen rodents, frog's and other reptiles are commercially available. Feeding pythons live animals is not advised as it can cause undue distress to the prey animal and if not eaten straight away your python may run the risk of being bitten by its prey. Freshly thawed (i.e. Warmed to room or body temperature, not cold or partly frozen) food, should be placed into the pythons enclosure with tongs (or forceps) so that the snake does not mistake your hand for food. The size and quantity is relevant to the size of the python, a little common sense should be exercised to judge the size of a meal. A feeding chart should be kept to remember when the last feeding was as when your python grows feedings will be more infrequent. Offer food once every 7 days when young, if food is not taken offer again in the next 7 days and if food is not taken a third time please consults a wildlife expert. When your python is fully grown they may only eat every 14 – 21 days as they store food much more efficiently.

## **Handling**

An Olive Pythons temperament is fantastic, often spoken of as the gentle giants. The key to a steady snake is handling while it is young, and handling often. Some snakes instinctively bite the first thing that moves when a cage door opens, this imprint may have developed because the only time the cage door had been opened was at feeding time. The snake associates the door opening with food which may be overcome by frequent handling. Pythons do get used to handling and often seem to enjoy it. Please don't allow them onto the floor even if you think it's safe. They are quick and can easily get stuck, hurt, lost or even escape. Don't handle after they have eaten at least for a few days. Wash your hands before and after handling your python.

## **Ailments and disorders**

Common disorders which python keepers should be aware of are as follows:

- Respiratory infections
  - Symptoms – loss of appetite, inactivity, wheezing, and/or nasal discharge, signs of scale rot, or blister disease.
- Mouth infections

- Symptoms – small unaccountable bleeding lesions in gums, swelling of the mouth, snake not being able to close its mouth
- Skin Disorders
  - Symptoms – not shedding properly or not at all.
- Internal Parasites
  - Symptoms – Weight loss, lethargy, failure to grow or thrive, lowered resistance to disease, reproductive failure, partial paralysis, and pain exhibited in the fore body, or death.
- External Parasites
  - Symptoms – minute white spots on the snakes scales, abnormal soaking in the water bowl by the snake, tiny black spots seen in the bottom of the cage or in the water bowl
- Constipation
- Neurological disorders
  - Irregular behaviour or movements in the snake such as awkwardness, shaky muscle tremors, convulsions.
- Eye disorders
  - Symptoms – pieces of skin over both or one eye, cloudy eyes, swelling.

If any of these symptoms occur in your Olive Python please consult your veterinarian.

### **Juvenile care**

To care for newly hatched juvenile snakes, the temperature must be constant 28°C. No temperature gradient is required in the first year or so. Juveniles must be housed separately in small plastic type containers and placed in a heated enclosure; this allows the snake to feel secure in its surroundings. Newspaper is the ideal substrate in this situation, as cleaning can be reduced to a manageable level. A small branch and water bowl should also be kept with the juvenile snake as this gives a place to sit and fresh water to drink respectively. A cardboard cylinder is recommended or a cave when snakes are juveniles.