



Common Name: Carpet Python

Scientific Name: *Morelia spilota* sp.

Locals:

- Darwin (*Morelia spilota variegata*) adult size about 10ft
- Jungle (*Morelia spilota cheynei*), adult size about 8ft
- Coastal (*Morelia spilota mcdowelli*), adult size about 12ft
- Centralian (*Morelia bredli*), adult size about 10ft
- Diamond (*Morelia spilota spilota*), adult size about 8ft
- South western Carpet Python (*Morelia spilota imbricata*), adult size about 8ft

Biology and Behaviour

Carpets are semi-arboreal pythons in nature. Some pythons tend to be nippy as young but can be tamed with some handling and patience. A rare exception is the Jungle Python which as adults can be slightly more aggressive than other species of Carpet Pythons. Carpet Pythons, as with all pythons, are non – venomous snakes. A 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. Carpets make great and easy captives. They are low maintenance and have good personalities, and most subspecies are a manageable size for anyone. Carpet Pythons have a life – span of 15 – 20 years.

Requirements

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

Housing

Enclosures can be set up with horizontal floor space for the terrestrial pythons, vertically for the arboreal Carpet Pythons. Enclosure size for a juvenile should be a minimum of 60cm (2 feet long) x 60cm (2 feet high) x 60cm (2 feet deep), for an adult carpet python a minimum enclosure size should be 91.5 cm (3 feet) to 120cm (4 feet)long x 120 cm (4 feet high) and 60 cm (2 feet deep) ,depending on species of carpet python . 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. 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 enclosure should be cleaned out at least once a week to help prevent

disease and a suitable disinfectant used (Such as F10).

Substrate

Bark, aspen, sand, synthetic grass, 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 sloughing. 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. Carpet Pythons' body temperature is required in order to digest their food and remain active. The carpet pythons preferred body temperature is 30 - 32°C, which it regulates by moving between warm and cool areas. Place a basking lamp at one end of the enclosure so there is a warm end and a cool end (thermal gradient) allowing the python to heat up and cool off, as it requires. The hot spot should be approximately 28-35°C. (But remember your enclosure should be large enough to have a thermal gradient of at least 5-8°C or more). Diamond Pythons however prefer cooler temperatures with a hot end at 28°C and a cool end of 25°C. The size of the enclosure will determine the wattage of the heat lamp used. As pythons are mostly nocturnal, UV lighting is not required, with the exception of the Diamond Python. Diamond Pythons are more arboreal than the other sub – species of Carpet Python and therefore require more sunlight, which is supplied by a 2.0UV spectrum fluorescent tube.

Feeding

The Carpet Pythons diet usually consists of small mammals and birds. A range of frozen rodents 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

A Carpet Pythons temperament can vary from individual to individual as with all animals, some bite others do not, the key to a steady snake is handling while it is still 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. 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 sloughing 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 Carpet Python please consult your veterinarian.

Juvenile care

To care for newly hatched juvenile snakes, the temperature must be constant between 28 - 30°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. Caves are a good idea when snakes are juveniles.