

Python reticulatus

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Common names: *reticulated python*,^[2] *regal python*,^[3] *Asiatic reticulated python*.

Python reticulatus is a species of python found in Southeast Asia. Adults grow to a maximum of over 28 feet (8.7 m) in length^[4] and are the world's longest snakes, but are not the most heavily built. Like all pythons, they are non-venomous constrictors and normally not considered dangerous to man, even though large specimens are powerful enough to kill an adult and attacks are occasionally reported.

An excellent swimmer, it has even been reported far out at sea and has consequently colonized many small islands within its range. The specific name is Latin meaning *net-like*, or reticulated, and is a reference to the complex color pattern.^[5]

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Description



P. reticulatus

Adults grow to a maximum of more than 28.5 feet (8.7 m) in length and are probably the world's longest snakes.^[6] However, they are relatively slim for their length and are certainly not the most heavily built.^[7] The anaconda,

Python reticulatus



Scientific classification

Kingdom: Animalia
 Phylum: Chordata
 Class: Reptilia
 Order: Squamata
 Family: Pythonidae
 Genus: *Python*
 Species: *P. reticulatus*

Binomial name

Python reticulatus
 (Schneider, 1801)



Synonyms

- *Boa Reticulata* - Schneider, 1801
- *Boa rhombeata* - Schneider, 1801
- *Boa phrygia* - Shaw, 1802
- *Coluber Javanicus* - Shaw, 1802
- *Python Schneideri* - Merrem, 1820
- *Python reticulatus* - Gray, 1842
- *Python reticulatus* - Boulenger, 1893
- *Mondia reticulatus*

Eunectes murinus, may be larger.^[6] The largest individual ever accurately measured was Colossus, kept at the Pittsburgh Zoo during the 1950s, with a peak length of 28.5 feet. Numerous reports have been made of larger snakes, but since none of these have been measured by a scientist nor have the specimens been deposited at a museum, they must be regarded as unproven and probably erroneous. In spite of a standing offer of \$50,000 for a live, healthy snake over 30 feet long by the New York Zoological Society, no attempt to claim this rewards has ever been made.^[4]

The color pattern is a complex geometric pattern that incorporates different colors. The back typically has a series of irregular diamond shapes which are flanked by smaller markings with light centers. In this species' wide range, much variation of size, color, and markings commonly occurs.

In zoo exhibits the color pattern may seem garish, but in a shadowy jungle environment amid fallen leaves and debris it allows them to virtually disappear. Called a *disruptive coloration*, it protects them from predators and helps them to catch their prey.^[6]

Geographic range

Found in Southeast Asia from the Nicobar Islands, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore, east through Indonesia and the Indo-Australian Archipelago (Sumatra, the Mentawai Islands, the Natuna Islands, Borneo, Sulawesi, Java, Lombok, Sumbawa, Sumba, Flores, Timor, Maluku, Tanimbar Islands) and the Philippines (Basilan, Bohol, Cebu, Leyte, Luzon, Mindanao, Mindoro, Negros, Palawan, Panay, Polillo, Samar, Tawi-Tawi). The original description does not include a type locality. Restricted to "Java" by Brongersma (1972).^[1]

Habitat

Occurs in rain forests, woodland and nearby grassland. It is also associated with rivers and is found in areas with nearby streams and lakes. An excellent swimmer, it has even been reported far out at sea and has consequently colonized many small islands within its range.^[6] During the early years of the twentieth century it is said to have been common even in busy parts of Bangkok, sometimes eating domestic animals.^[7]

Feeding

Their natural diet includes mammals and occasionally birds. Small specimens—up to 3–4 meters (10–14 ft) long—eat mainly rodents such as rats, whereas larger individuals switch to prey such as Viverridae (e.g. civets and binturongs), and even primates and pigs. Near human habitation, they are known to snatch stray chickens, cats and dogs on occasion. Among the largest prey items that are actually fully documented to have been taken were a half-starved old female Sun Bear of 23 kilograms that was eaten by a 6.95 m (23 ft) specimen and took some 10 weeks to digest, as well as pigs of more than 60 kg (132 lb). As a rule of thumb, these snakes seem able to swallow prey up to ¼ their own length, and up to their own weight.^[8] As with all pythons, they are ambush hunters, waiting until prey wanders within strike range before seizing it in their coils and killing via constriction.

Danger to humans

Attacks on humans are rare, but this species has been responsible for several human fatalities, in both

the wild and captivity. They are among the few snakes that have been fairly reliably reported to eat people, although only 1–3 cases of the snake actually eating rather than just killing a human seem to have been verified:

- Two incidents, apparently in early 20th century Indonesia: On Salibabu, a 14-year-old boy was killed and supposedly eaten by a specimen 5.17 m (c.17 ft) in length. Another incident involved an adult woman reputedly eaten by a "large reticulated python", but few details are known.^[9]
- Franz Werner reports^[4] a case from Burma (or Myanmar) either occurring in the early 1910s or in 1927. A jeweller named Maung Chit Chine, who went hunting with his friends, was apparently eaten by a 6 m (20 ft) specimen after he sought shelter from a rainstorm on or under a tree. Supposedly, he was swallowed feet first, contrary to normal snake behavior but the easiest way for a snake to actually swallow a human.^[10]
- In 1932, Frank Buck wrote about a teenage boy who was eaten by a pet 25 ft reticulated python in the Philippines. According to Buck, the python had escaped and when it was found they could recognize a human child shape inside the snake, which later turned out to be the son of the snake's owner.^[4]
- According to Mark Auliya, the corpse of 32-year-old Mangyan Lantod Gumiliu was recovered from the belly of a 7 m (c.23 ft) Reticulated Python on Mindoro, probably in January, 1998.^[8]
- On October 23, 2008 a 25 year old Virginia Beach woman, Amanda Ruth Black, appeared to have been killed by a 13-foot pet reticulated python. The apparent cause of death was asphyxiation. The snake was later found in the bedroom in an agitated state.^[11]
- On January 21, 2009 a 3 year old Las Vegas boy was wrapped by an 18-foot pet reticulated python, turning blue. The boy's mother, who had been babysitting the python on behalf of a friend, rescued the toddler by gashing the python with a knife. The snake was killed by animal control officers.^[12]

Considering the known maximum prey size, it is technically possible for a full-grown specimen to open its jaws wide enough to swallow a human child, teenager, or even a small adult, although the flaring shoulders of *Homo sapiens* would pose a major problem. The victim would almost certainly be dead by the time the snake started swallowing. At least in the 1998 incident, the victim was gathering food or wood in the forest when he happened upon the snake. In any case, it is unlikely that any but the largest specimens are able to kill, let alone eat, an adult human, except if the victim is caught unaware.^[8]

Reproduction

Oviparous, females lay between 15 and 80 eggs per clutch. At an optimum incubation temperature of 31–32°C (88–90 °F), the eggs take an average of 88 days to hatch.^[13] Hatchlings are at least 2 feet (61 cm) in length.^[7]

Captivity

Increased popularity in the pet trade is due largely to increased efforts in captive breeding and selectively bred mutations such as the "albino" and "tiger" strains. They can make good captives, but keepers should have previous experience with such large constrictors to ensure safety to both animal and keeper. Although their interactivity and beauty draws much attention, some feel they are unpredictable.^{[14][15]} They do not attack humans by nature, but will bite and possibly constrict if they feel threatened, or mistake a hand for food. While not venomous, large pythons can inflict serious injuries, sometimes

requiring stitches.

The huge size and attractive pattern of these snakes has made them favorite zoo exhibits, with several individuals claimed to be above 20 feet in length and more than one claimed to be the largest in captivity.^{[16][17][18][19][20][21]} However, due to their huge size, immense strength, aggressive disposition, and the mobility of the skin relative to the body, it is very difficult to get exact length measurements on a living reticulated python, and weights are rarely indicative, as captive pythons are often obese.^[4] Claims made by zoos and animal parks are sometimes exaggerated, such as the claimed 49-foot snake in Indonesia which was subsequently proven to be less than 22 feet.^[22] For this reason, scientists do not accept the validity of length measurements unless performed on a dead or anaesthetized snake which is later preserved in a museum collection.^[4]

Farming

Over the past 20 years, farming of this species has grown considerably in many Asian countries, including Indonesia. It is rumored that European settlers introduced them to the region in 1558. Current estimates state that there are roughly 5,400 such farms throughout Southeast Asia. Native peoples first gained interest in farming them when they realized the skin could easily be sold for profit in the snake skin industry. The skins are popular sources for purses and boots, such as the typical snake skin cowboy boot. Prada has also used the skins on some of their purses. The meat is also considered a delicacy amongst local peoples and sells for as much as 50 USD per kilogram

Taxonomy

Three subspecies may be encountered, including two new ones:

- *P. r. reticulatus*, Schneider (1801) - Called "retics" in herpetoculture.
- *P. r. jampeanus*, Auliya *et al.* (2002) - Kayaudi dwarf reticulated pythons or Jampea retics, about half the length^[13]. Found on Tanahjampea in the Selayar Archipelago south of Sulawesi.
- *P. r. saputrai*, Auliya *et al.* (2002) - Selayer reticulated pythons or Selayer retics. Found on Selayar Island in the Selayar Archipelago and also adjacent Sulawesi.

The latter two are dwarf subspecies. Apparently, the population of the Sangir Islands north of Sulawesi represents another such subspecies, but it is not yet formally described.^[23]

The proposed subspecies *dalegibbonsi*, *euanedwardsi*, *haydnmacphiei*, *neilsonnemani*, *patrickcouperi* and *stuartbigmorei*, as well as the idea of moving the species to the monotypic genus *Broghammerus*,^{[24][25]} are rejected by most professional and amateur herpetologists. Most, if not all, of these taxa are generally considered *nomina dubia*.^[26]

See also

- List of pythonid species and subspecies
- Pythonidae by common name
- Pythonidae by taxonomic synonyms

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External links

- *Python reticulatus* (<http://www.jcvi.org/reptiles/species.php?genus=Python&species=reticulatus>) at the TIGR Reptile Database (<http://www.reptile-database.org/>). Accessed 12 September 2007.
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