

# Ball Python

*Python regius*

**Class:** *Reptilia*

**Order:** *Squamata*

**Family:** *Pythonidae*

**Characteristics:** The smallest of all pythons. Male grows only to 3-4 feet whereas female is larger at 4-4.5 feet. Flat head, round eyes, square, boxy snout and heavy jaw muscles that make sides of head bulge outwards. 100-150 sharp teeth curve toward the back. Neck narrow with stout trunk. Black and pale stripes run along face partly masking eyes. Adult body has large spots of brown outlined in black and white. Yellow and green spots on young outlined in black and white.

**Behavior:** Good climber though usually seen on the ground. Kills prey by wrapping in constricting coils or pressing against burrow walls. Known as picky eaters, tend to fast and become inactive in cool weather as bodies are not warm enough to digest food. Hisses loudly and coils into tight ball when threatened with head and neck tucked away into middle. Hide in mammal burrows and other underground places. Eats weekly and sheds monthly with proper humidity. Captive adults rarely bite.

**Reproduction:** Sexually mature at 5 years, female breeds once every two or three years. Egg bearing female turns darker in color and after laying 4 to 10 leathery-shelled eggs will coil around them fasting for the 80 day incubation period with only infrequent searches for water. Precocial hatchlings are left by female to fend for themselves.

## **Diet:**

Wild: Hunts rats, gerbils, jerboas, shrews

Zoo: Mice/Hoppers weekly.

**Conservation:** IUCN Status: Least Concern. Exportation for pet trade lowering numbers of certain populations to the point they may become extinct in those regions. Worldwide Habitat destruction and hunting skins for tourist products is also contributing to their decline.

**FYI:** -Considered good pets because of small size and placid nature.

Oldest known lived to be 47 years in a Pennsylvania zoo

-Common name refers to the tendency to curl up into a ball when stressed or frightened.

-AKA "Royal Python" based on the story that Cleopatra wore one on her wrist.

-Considered symbolic of the earth by the Igbo people of Nigeria because they travel so close to the ground.



## **Range & Habitat:**

West Africa east to Nile River in dry grassland, savanna and at forest edges.



**Lifespan:** up to 30 years in captivity, unknown in the wild.

## **Special Adaptations:**

Hones in on prey in utter darkness through heat seeking nerves in upper jaws coupled with ability to see well in darkness.

## **IUCN Conservation Status:**

Least Concern

