



Water Python (*Liasis fuscus*) Care sheet

Water pythons are infamous for their scales which shimmer the colors of a rainbow under light. That being said, they are thought to be the original Rainbow Serpent which in Aboriginal stories created rivers and valleys. In the dark, water pythons appear to be a solid brown to black color. They can grow up to 2.5 meters in length and are native to northern Australia and Papua New Guinea within freshwater rivers, creeks, swamps, and lagoons. They are great swimmers and often use water as an escape route from predators.

HOUSING: Water pythons can be kept in glass enclosures. As a general rule of thumb, the length of the vivarium should be at least 1.5 times the length of the snake. Furthermore, the height of the enclosure should be greater than the length of the enclosure to provide sufficient space for the snake to climb on branches. That being said, providing ample amounts of natural branches and vines is crucial. There are many options for substrate including moss, leaf litter, recycled paper cat litter, paper towel, and wooden shavings. To keep the humidity high, around 70%, the enclosure should be misted with warm water every couple of days and the water bowl should be placed under the heat lamp. Water pythons may also be provided with a swimming area, as they are efficient swimmers. This can be created by sectioning a portion of the vivarium to create a “swamp” or by placing a large, sturdy bowl of fresh dechlorinated water into the enclosure.

TEMPERATURE & LIGHTING: Similar to other snakes and reptiles, the water python requires both UVA and UVB lighting, which should be replaced every 4-6 months. During the summer months, the light should be switched on for roughly 12 hours each day. During the winter months, the amount of daylight can be reduced to 10 hours a day.

A temperature gradient should always be provided by placing a heating lamp at one side of the vivarium, ensuring the snake cannot physically reach the lamp and get burned. The basking spot should reach 35°C while the cool end should be maintained around 25°C. Hatchlings can be maintained at a lower temperature gradient around 25 °C -32 °C. Heat mats within the enclosure and heat rocks are not recommended as they often malfunction and lead to thermal burns.

WATER: Fresh clean water should be provided at all times in a solid, spill-proof container and changed regularly.

FOOD: In the wild, water pythons thrive off of a variety of foods including rats, bandicoots, wallabies, water birds, and eggs! Juveniles in the wild will take frogs, fish, and lizards. In captivity, however, water pythons will eat mice, rats, and chickens. Adults should be fed once every 2-3 weeks while young pythons require weekly feedings, and juveniles can be offered





food up to twice a week. Ensure frozen food is thawed properly before being offered and ensure the snake has been kept warm before feeding.

HEALTH PROBLEMS: Reptiles in general are very good at hiding their health problems until they become very serious. For this reason, it is very important that you get your snake checked over by an experienced reptile veterinarian every 6-12 months.

Common problems where veterinary advice is recommended are mites, wheezing, dysecdysis (trouble shedding), prolonged inappetence outside of the cooler months of the year, lethargy, diarrhoea, abnormal movement and regurgitation.

QUARANTINE: The length of quarantine is a contentious area with many different protocols implemented across the world. With the recent advancements in our understanding of reptile viruses and diseases it now appears that we may not be able to 'out-quarantine' some of the newly discovered reptile viruses which makes recommended a time-frame complicated. Most reptile veterinarians now recommend a quarantine period of at least 6 months for newly acquired snakes. Quarantined animals should be kept in a separate room with no shared contact or airspace. Any handling, feeding or cleaning of the cages should be completed last after all the other non-quarantined animals. If further work needs to be done with the rest of the collection after the animals in quarantine then a complete change of clothes and a thorough disinfection of hands and any equipment used is recommended.

If you have any further questions about your snake please don't hesitate to contact us.

