

# Python regius



## Scientific Classification

Kingdom:	Anamalia
Phylum:	Cordata
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Squamata
Suborder:	Serpentes
Family:	Pythonidae
Geunus	Python
Species	<b>P. Regius</b>

## Binomial Name

***Python regius***  
([Shaw](#), 1802)



## Synonyms

- *Boa regia* [Shaw](#), 1802
- *Enygrus regi'us* - [Wagler](#), 1830
- *Cenchrus regia* - [Gray](#), 1831
- *Python Bellii* [Gray](#), 1842
- *Python regius* - [A.M.C. Duméril & Bibron](#), 1844
- *Hortulia regia* - [Gray](#), 1849
- *Python regius* - [Boulenger](#), 1893<sup>[1]</sup>

The **ball python** (*Python regius*), also known as the **royal python**,<sup>[2]</sup> is a [python](#) species found in sub-Saharan [Africa](#). Like all other pythons, it is a [nonvenomous constrictor](#). This is the smallest of the African pythons and is popular in the pet trade, largely due to its small size and typically docile temperament. No [subspecies](#) are currently recognized.<sup>[3]</sup> The name "ball python" refers to the animal's tendency to curl into a ball when [stressed](#) or frightened.<sup>[4]</sup> The name "royal python" (from the Latin *regius*) comes from the fact that rulers in Africa would wear the python as jewelry.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## Description



Close-up of head

Maximum adult length of this [species](#) is 182 cm (6.0 ft).<sup>[5]</sup> Females tend to be slightly bigger than males, maturing around 122–137 cm (4.0–4.5 ft). Males typically grow to around 90–107 cm (3.0–3.5 ft).<sup>[6]</sup> Their build is stocky,<sup>[2]</sup> while the head is relatively small. The scales are smooth<sup>[5]</sup> and both sexes have [anal spurs](#) on either side of the vent.<sup>[7]</sup> Although males tend to have larger spurs, this is not definitive, and sex is best determined by manual eversion of the male [hemipenes](#) or inserting a probe into the [cloaca](#) to check the presence of an inverted hemipenis (if male).<sup>[8]</sup> When probing to determine sex, males typically measure eight to 10 [subcaudal scales](#), and females typically measure two to four subcaudal scales.<sup>[5]</sup>

The color pattern is typically black or dark brown with light brown or gold sides and dorsal blotches. The belly is a white or cream that may include scattered black markings.<sup>[5]</sup> However, those in the pet industries have, through selective breeding, developed many [morphs](#) ([genetic mutations](#)) with altered colors and patterns.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Distribution and habitat

They are found in west [Sub Saharan Africa](#) from [Senegal](#), [Mali](#), [Guinea-Bissau](#), [Guinea](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [Liberia](#), [Ivory Coast](#), [Ghana](#), [Benin](#), and [Nigeria](#) through [Cameroon](#), [Chad](#), and the [Central African Republic](#) to [Sudan](#) and [Uganda](#). No [type locality](#) was given in the original description.<sup>[1]</sup>

The ball python bears a strong physical resemblance to the [Burmese python](#), whose adaptive abilities have caused it to become classified as an [invasive species](#) in places such as

the [Florida Everglades](#). The ball python, however, has not been known to reproduce in the wild outside of its native range and no reproducing wild populations are known in Florida.<sup>[10]</sup>

Ball pythons prefer grasslands, [savannas](#), and sparsely wooded areas,<sup>[2]</sup> but have been shown to adapt to all types of environments. Males tend to display more semi-arboreal behaviours, whilst females tend towards terrestrial behaviours.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Behavior

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This terrestrial species is known for its defense strategy that involves coiling into a tight ball when threatened, with its head and neck tucked away in the middle. In this state, it can literally be rolled around. Favored retreats include mammal burrows and other underground hiding places, where they also [aestivate](#). In captivity, they are considered good pets, with their relatively small size and placid nature making them easy to handle.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Diet

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In the wild, their diet consists mostly of small mammals, such as [African soft-furred rats](#), [shrews](#), and [striped mice](#) and birds. Younger pythons, under 70 cm total length, and males prey almost exclusively on small birds (nestlings and immature young) whilst pythons greater than 70 cm total length, and females prey almost exclusively on small mammals.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Reproduction

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Females are [oviparous](#), with 3 to 11 rather large, leathery eggs being laid (four to six are most common).<sup>[6]</sup> These are incubated by the female under the ground (via a shivering motion), and hatch after 55 to 60 days. Sexual maturity is reached at 11–18 months for males, and 20–36 months for females. Age is only one factor in determining sexual maturity and ability to breed; weight is the second factor. Males breed at 600 g or more, but in captivity are often not bred until they are 800 g (1.7 lb), although in captivity, some males have been known to begin breeding at 300–400 g. Females breed in the wild at weights as low as 800 g though 1200 g or more in weight is most common; in captivity, breeders generally wait until they are no less than 1500 g (3.3 lb). Parental care of the eggs ends once they hatch, and the female leaves the offspring to fend for themselves.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Captivity

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An [albino](#) ball python



A ball python in the [Bronx Zoo](#)

Wild-caught specimens have greater difficulty adapting to a captive environment, which can result in refusal to feed, and they generally carry internal or external [parasites](#). Specimens have survived for over 40 years in captivity, with the oldest recorded ball python being kept in captivity 47 years and 6 months until its death in 1992 at the [Philadelphia Zoo](#).<sup>[13]</sup>

Hundreds of different color patterns are available in captive snakes. Some of the most common are Spider, Pastel, Albino, Mojave, and Lesser. Breeders are continuously creating new designer morphs, and over 5,300 different morphs currently exist.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Breeding

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Ball Pythons are one of the most common reptiles bred in captivity. They usually are able to produce a clutch of six eggs on average, but clutch sizes also range from one to eleven. Ball pythons reach sexual maturity at the age of two to two and a half years and a weight of 1500 grams. These snakes usually lay one clutch per year and the eggs hatch around sixty days later. Usually these eggs are artificially incubated in a captive environment at temperatures between 88-90 degrees Fahrenheit. Some captive breeders use ultra-sounding technology to verify the progress of reproductive development. This can help to increase chances of successful fertilization as the ultra-sound can help predict best times to introduce males and females during breeding season.<sup>[15]</sup>



Ball Python Eggs Incubating.

## Beliefs and folklore

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This species is particularly revered in the [traditional religion](#) of the [Igbo people](#) of southeastern [Nigeria](#). It is considered symbolic of the earth, being an animal that travels so close to the ground. Even among many [Christian](#) Igbos, these pythons are treated with great care whenever they happen to wander into a village or onto someone's property; they are allowed to roam freely or are very gently picked up and placed out in a forest or field away from any homes. If one is accidentally killed, many communities in Igboland still build a [coffin](#) for the snake's remains and give it a short funeral.<sup>[16]</sup>