

Pythons in Brisbane

Fact Sheet



Carpet python, *Morelia spilota*. Image: QM, Jeff Wright.

Pythons and boas are famous for the enormous sizes attained by some species. Maximum recorded lengths of about 10 m are generally attributed to the Reticulated Python (*Broghammerus reticulatus*) of South- East Asia. This species occasionally preys on humans, though the frequency of these events is greatly exaggerated.

The largest Australian snake is the Amethyst Python (*Morelia kinghorni*) of northern Queensland. This slender species averages about 3.5 m, though there is an unsubstantiated, dubious record of 8 m.



Spotted Python, *Antaresia maculosa*. Image: QM, Jeff Wright.

Two pythons occur in the Brisbane area. The smaller of these, the 1 m Spotted Python (*Antaresia maculosa*), is uncommon here. It is patchily distributed in outer suburbs and adjacent bushland, particularly in dry habitats and where cliffs or rock outcrops are present. The 3 m Carpet Python (*Morelia spilota*), pictured above, is abundant in Brisbane suburbs, where it often takes up residence in the ceilings of houses. The Queensland Museum sometimes receives calls from horrified householders who have climbed into their ceiling to repair a leak, only to find the rafters festooned with the shed skins of large pythons. In some suburbs evidence of occupation by Carpet Pythons can be seen in up to 50 per cent of houses. It is not uncommon for farmers to encourage Carpet Pythons in their barns to control rats.

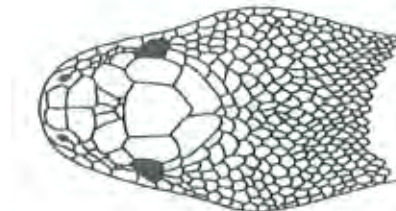
Apart from obvious size differences, Brisbane's two pythons can be distinguished easily by the nature and position of the scales on top of their heads.

On Spotted Pythons these are large and symmetrically arranged plates, whereas Carpet Pythons have numerous

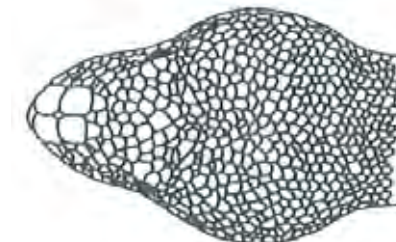
small irregularly placed granules.

All pythons are non-venomous. They kill their prey by constriction. Contrary to popular belief, this does not involve crushing the victim to death, but rather squeezing it in ever tightening coils until death occurs by cessation of blood flow and suffocation.

Like all snakes, pythons explore their surroundings using a combination of senses. In particular, the tongue transfers airborne scent particles to a sensitive chemical analysis structure called the Jacobson's Organ set in the roof of the mouth. Warm-blooded prey can also be detected by heat-sensitive organs found in a row of pits set into the scales along the lips.



Spotted Python. The head scales are large, symmetrically arranged shields.



Carpet Python. Notice the small, granular scales on top of the head.

There is a common myth concerning pythons interbreeding with venomous snakes. The offspring are said to combine all the most feared aspects of each parent; extremely large size, strong toxins and the ability to constrict. Since pythons (family Pythonidae) are only distantly related to venomous snakes (family Elapidae) such interbreeding can not occur.

Further Information

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Python head illustrations: Sharon Postlewait, in Weigal, J., 1990, Australian Reptile Park's Guide to Snakes of South-East Australia. Australian Reptile Park, Gosford, NSW.

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