Ball Python
Python regius

CAGING: The Ball Python averages 3 to 4 feet, rarely exceeding 5 feet in length. A thirty gallon aquarium or cage of equal size is quite adequate. Be sure the cage is secure. On aquariums, use fine mesh wire covers, with clips to hold it on. Be sure they are secure enough to hold the snake. For bedding, use paper towels, Astroturf, brown paper or newspaper (black & white only!), as they are cheap and easy to clean or replace. Avoid shavings and other loose materials; they may be swallowed, causing problems for your animal. An easily cleaned hiding box should also be provided. A climbing branch is often appreciated.

WATER: Your snake should always have clean water, and, when possible, a dish large enough to soak in, especially when shedding.

TEMPERATURE: The Ball Python comes from west Africa and prefers temperatures from 77-86 degrees, so some type of heating is needed. This can be provided by a heating pad or a light bulb in a reflector fitting. (A black or red light bulb will allow the snake to sleep without having to turn off the heat at night.) The heating pad can be placed under the cage. The light should be placed above the cage so that it shines down into the cage. Place either one so that only one end of the cage is heated, giving your snake a temperature gradient. A thermometer should be kept in the warm end of the cage to assure that you maintain a good temperature.

FOOD: Ball Pythons often fast for up to six months, and sometimes for up to a year!! Unless your snake is noticeably losing weight, don't worry. If your snake won't eat, handle it as little as possible, provide a normal day/night cycle, and give it an adequate hiding box. Try feeding it in its hiding box. Be very still when feeding your snake, but always watch when giving it live food. Mice can hurt your snake. If it won't take live mice, try a dead one. If that doesn't work, increase the temperature to 85-90 degrees, wait a day or two, and try again. If it still won't eat, and you've been using white mice, try a brown mouse. Ball Pythons in the wild eat jerboas; small, brown, gerbil-like rodents. The color change may do the trick. If your snake won't eat brown mice, try a dead gerbil. DO NOT give it live gerbils; a live gerbil can kill a Ball Python! If you can get it eating dead gerbils regularly, you can eventually wean your snake back to eating mice by rubbing them with a dead gerbil kept in the freezer. Start with brown mice, and when those are readily accepted, switch to the more easily obtained white mice. If none of this works, contact the New England Herpetological Society.

HEALTH& CLEANING : Ticks and mites are common on these snakes. To eliminate them, place a small piece of 'No-Pest' strip in a jar (with several holes in the lid) in the cage, and leave the jar for 2-3 days. Repeat, if necessary, in two weeks. Remove the water dish while the jar is in the cage. Cages must be kept clean to prevent mites, ticks, scale rot, and other problems. Anti-bacterial cleaning solutions are recommended. One ounce of bleach in ten ounces of water is one such solution. Rinse the cage with clean water after using any solution. Don't use Lysol, Lestoil or other such oil-based cleaners; they are deadly to reptiles.

HANDLING: Most Ball Pythons available at pet stores are wild-caught adults. They are frequently very shy about being handled, and will refuse to eat if they are handled too frequently. Captive-born babies are much more comfortable with being handled, and are better pets for people who wish to handle their snakes. Captive-born babies are less common in pet stores, but do show up occasionally. Don't handle any snake for 48 hours after feeding, or if it becomes ill or stops feeding, unless the cage needs cleaning. Keep handling to a minimum when your snake is getting ready to shed. The skin can be damaged easily during this time.

This Care Sheet was originally written by New England Herpetological Society. It can be found at www.neherp.com or www.AnimalCityInc.com

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