



## Husbandry Handbook

# BALL PYTHON

*Python regius*

### The Rising Star

Ball Pythons have always been a cornerstone reptilian pet. They are a docile species that doesn't get very large, are long lived (25-30 years or more) and are very easy to keep. In the 1990s genetic variations called morphs began to arise and captive breeding of this species began to become more popular. Since it was much easier to get captive bred hatchlings to eat, captive breeding eventually became the standard and wild caught specimen became less and less desirable. Over the next few decades a few initial genetic morphs turned into hundreds of gene combinations resulting in colors and patterns no one had ever seen. Through selective breeding, you can now find Ball Pythons that are all white with blue eyes, grayish purple and yellow, orange and lavender, and patterned with stripes, spots, and many other amazing pattern and color combinations. As more people have come to keep and breed these amazing snakes, they have become one of the most kept reptile pets in the world

### Habitat

Ball Pythons are found in sub-Saharan Africa in countries like Mali, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Cameroon, Chad and Uganda. The majority of their habitat is dry grasslands, savannas and forest edges. These terrestrial snakes can usually be found hiding in burrows and other underground hiding places where they avoid the African heat and aestivate (go into summer dormancy). The burrows they hide in are frequently previous homes of the native pouched rats which the Ball Pythons have preyed upon. Depending on the temperatures, these snakes may spend up to 22 hours of the day in their burrows, only coming out to warm up and hunt or find water.



### Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling Ball Pythons can be housed in a 20L Zilla® Critter Cage. Adults require a minimum of a 40BR Zilla® Critter Cage. While Ball Pythons can reach a length of 54", they are mainly terrestrial and don't need a tall tank. Provide Ball Pythons with substrates that enable burrowing such as Zilla® Lizard Litter or Zilla® Bark Blend. Do not use pine or cedar shavings as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Decorate the tank with a hide, driftwood, rocks and/or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. Don't forget to provide a water bowl.

### Temperature and Humidity

It is important to create a thermal gradient (a warm side and a cool side) in the cage/enclosure. This can be done with an appropriately sized Zilla® Heat Mat adhered to the bottom of the tank on one side. Ideal temperatures for Ball Pythons range from 75-80°F on the cool side and 80-85°F on the warm side. Provide an 88-92°F basking area on the warm side. Using a Zilla® Mini Heat & UVB Fixture with a Zilla® 50W Mini Halogen bulb and a Zilla® Tropical Mini Compact Fluorescent UVB Bulb will provide the correct heat and UV for your Ball Python to thrive. While Ball Pythons don't need UVB to survive, UVA/UVB light has been shown to greatly improve the immune system, health, and wellness of all reptiles, both diurnal and crepuscular. Make sure to place the light over the side with the heat mat to help create that warm side of the thermal gradient. Spot clean the enclosure for urates and feces once a week. Every 3 months, remove all substrate in order to clean and disinfect the tank and décor.

### Feeding/Diet

In the wild, Ball Python will prey upon small mammals like rodents and small birds. Most hatchlings can be started off on hopper mice or fuzzy rats once per week. Food items can gradually be increased as needed. Most adult Ball Pythons can be fed small to medium adult rats once every 7-10 days. A general rule of thumb to follow when feeding snakes is to provide prey items that are approximately the same width as the widest point of the snake. It should be noted that these snakes regularly refuse food for long periods of time, especially in the winter months. While this can be alarming, it is not out of the ordinary. During this time, their weight should be monitored to make sure they don't become underweight or starve.

### Handling

As with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile Ball Pythons may initially be nervous and defensive. Ball Pythons will initially "ball up" or, less frequently, bite if frightened. Handle your Ball Python gently and deliberately taking care not drop or injure the animal. Most Ball Pythons will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older.

*Be sure to wash your hands after handling any reptiles.*

