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Boelen's Python (*Morelia/Simalia boeleni*)

Trophies Among the Pythons

Also occasionally known as the “Black Python”, the Boelen’s python is a mid-sized to large python species first discovered and described in 1952. Occurring only within the island of New Guinea and Indonesia, the Boelen’s python is a versatile, powerful, and semi-arboreal to semi fossorial species well adapted for living in its higher montane tropical forest to rainforest environments, where they are often adept climbers. As with most other pythons, they have heat sensitive labial, or lip pits along their upper jawline used to detect their endothermic prey, even in complete darkness. Coloration of this species is most often a vibrant, iridescent jet black to navy bluish-black to purplish-black with numerous paler cream colored to yellowish streaks and banding. The overall body and head are relatively stocky, and bold, vibrant black and yellow labial barring along the upper jawline is also present. Young and juvenile pythons of this species tend to possess a much more reddish, reddish-orange, to reddish-brown ground color with black edged markings than adults. Boelen’s pythons have been an attractive and long sought after species of python to maintain in captivity, and although most specimens which have been available have been, or were derived from wild caught and/or farmed animals, have been difficult to care for, and with captive keeping and breeding sporadic at best, this is slowly changing as this magnificent species continues to become more widely available and better established in captivity than before for the more intermediate to advanced level keeper or enthusiast.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Serpentes

Infraorder: Alethinophidia

Family: Pythonidae

Genus: *Morelia/Simalia*

Species: *Morelia/Simalia boeleni**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Boelen’s pythons have the potential to attain longevity of at least 20

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to 25 years or more, as with other boas and pythons. Up to 35 to 40 years may also be possible as well.

Distribution and Habitat

The Boelen's python occurs within a limited range of only western New Guinea and Indonesia, where they occupy higher elevations and montane, tropical forests and rainforests from 6,500 to 8,500 feet. This species will also frequently occupy subterranean burrows amongst their rocky outcroppings and vegetation as well. Younger, or juvenile Boelen's pythons, while rarely described in the wild, have been reported to also forage among lower elevations near streams and other water bodies as well.

Conservation Status

Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD). The Boelen's python is highly protected within its range of New Guinea, however, and is CITES Appendix II.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

Boelen's python hatchlings are typically around 15 to 18 inches in length when they hatch. As adults, this stunning species typically averages between 8 and 10 feet, or 96 to 120 inches. Larger sizes of up to 13 to 14 feet, or 156 to 168 inches have also been recorded.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Hatchling and young Boelen's pythons can be started out in a 20 to 40 gallon long terrarium or similar sized enclosure, but will soon require larger accommodations. If glass enclosures are used at any point, be sure that the enclosure retains sufficient humidity. Many of the commercially made plastic or fiberglass enclosures, or otherwise custom-designed enclosures that can retain heat and humidity well are perhaps the best and most practical enclosures to use to house mid to large sized boas and pythons. Depending on the age and size of the animal, a six to eight foot by three foot enclosure or larger is required. These pythons can be maintained on a substrate of cage liner material, cypress mulch, sphagnum moss, or sphagnum fir mixtures, but always ensure that the substrate does not become too damp or moist. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. These pythons will also require a large sturdy water dish or tub that must be cleaned, sanitized, and changed regularly, especially if dirtied. Providing an adequately sized hidebox, artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, logs, driftwood, branches, and other cage furnishings can also provide additional hiding, climbing, perching, and basking opportunities. Boelen's pythons are semi-arboreal, and will also benefit from cage height and some additional climbing opportunities as well as floor space.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized UTH (or tank heating pad), ceramic or radiant heat emitter, or incandescent, UVA/UVB, or other heat producing bulb. Ideal temperatures for Boelen's pythons range from 74 to 85 degrees F on the cool side and 86 to 105 degrees F on the warm side and as basking temperatures, and 70 to 80% overall humidity. Most species of snakes have fairly simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional full spectrum UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it can be greatly beneficial for this species' health, immune system, and overall wellness in particular, and in accordance to their natural history in the wild. Also be

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sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least once per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, Boelen's pythons are carnivorous, and will prey upon a wide range of small to large mammals, birds, and other reptiles and amphibians that they can ambush and consume. In captivity, these pythons can be given feeder rodents or rabbits of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. In most general circumstances, it is recommended to provide humanely pre-killed prey animals acquired from a reputable source, as offering live animals to any snake can carry risk of serious injury or even death to your snake when the prey item bites to defend itself or otherwise gnaws on your animal. A general rule of thumb when selecting feeder prey item sizes for your snake is to provide prey items that are approximately the same width as the snake's widest point. It should also be noted that many snakes may refuse food for longer periods of time over several weeks or months, especially in the fall and winter months or if several other husbandry conditions are not being met. While these things can be alarming, it is oftentimes normal, but their overall health and weight should be monitored during these times to make sure they do not lose weight or otherwise deteriorate. Most snakes typically are fed whole prey items, and do not usually require additional calcium or vitamin D3 supplementation unless otherwise directed. Their feeding frequency will also depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Boelen's pythons are shy species of pythons, and as with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile Boelen's pythons are often initially more nervous and nippy. They will often strike or react defensively to what they see as a potential threat. It is important to always handle your Boelen's python gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. With older or larger animals, safe and common sense handling practices pertaining to any of the larger constrictor species should be applied. While some Boelen's pythons, including even some wild caught and imported animals can become or may be very tame and handleable animals without the likelihood of biting or striking, others can be more defensive or nippy. These pythons in general are a large species that require careful and experienced handling, and are not for everyone (and certainly not beginners). However, for the advanced or experienced reptile keeper or owner, Boelen's pythons can make for very alert, active, and rewarding display or personal animals that are often a highly sought after and beautiful species.

Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens

For More Information:

To learn more about the natural history and husbandry of this complex and beautiful species of python, please refer to the following links below:

<http://www.boelenspythons.com/home.html>

<http://www.reptilesmagazine.com/Snake-Care/Boelens-Python-Care/>

<http://blogs.thatpetplace.com/thatreptileblog/2011/04/12/introducing-the-boelens-or-black-python/#.WrcDUIjwbIU>

<http://www.madisonherps.org>

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. MAHS cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety, including any and all MAHS logos and disclaimers.

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