



*

Scrub or Amethystine Python (*Morelia amethystina*)

Aussie Giants

Scrub pythons are a large, but slender bodied species of python that can vary considerably in color and pattern depending on subspecies and locality. They may have a ground color of light to dark brown, tan, yellowish, reddish or reddish brown, to olive with darker, irregular blotches, stripes, barring, and/or banding present. The head is fairly large and distinct with large parietal scales atop their head, and typically barred labial scales. Common names for this species include the Scrub Python, or Amethystine Python. The name “Amethystine” python is derived from this species’ milky, iridescent sheen, giving them an amethyst (or violet) sheen. Scrub/Amethystine pythons are among the 6 largest species of snakes in the world, and are the largest species of snakes in much of their range in Australia and New Guinea. Four subspecies are currently known, including: *Morelia a. amethystina*, *Morelia a. traceyi*, *Morelia a. nauta*, and *Morelia a. clastolepis*. Scrub pythons, as with many python species, are primarily nocturnal ambush predators, and are also quite semi arboreal, climbing, seeking refuge in, and locating prey from trees or outcrops.

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*

Species: *Morelia amethystina**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, scrub pythons can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more. Up to 40 years is also not unheard of.

Distribution and Habitat

Scrub/Amethystine pythons are a widely ranging species. Found in the tropical to sub-tropical forests & woodlands, scrublands, and even suburban areas of northeastern and eastern Australia

<http://www.madisonherps.org>

(Queensland), Irian Jaya, Papua New Guinea, and Indonesia.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

Scrub/Amethystine python hatchlings are typically around 15 to 18 inches in length when they hatch. Adult sizes of these pythons can vary considerably depending on subspecies and locality. They typically range from roughly 6 feet, or 72 inches to about 16 feet, or 194 inches. Reports of these snakes up roughly 27 feet also exist, but are exceptional.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Hatchling Scrub 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. Scrub 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. Scrub 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. Scrub 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 scrub pythons range from 75 to 82 degrees F on the cool side and 86 to 92 degrees F on the warm side. Most species of snakes have fairly simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. Also be 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, scrub pythons are carnivorous, and will prey upon a wide range of small to large mammals, birds, and other reptiles that they can ambush and consume. In captivity, scrub pythons can be given feeder rodents or rabbits of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Larger feeder or prey items for exceptionally large snakes can include prey items such as

<http://www.madisonherps.org>

large rabbits, and even poultry, pigs, and other pre-killed livestock, which can also often be obtained through alternative means through local wholesalers, meat, or agricultural suppliers in one's area. 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

As with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile scrub 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 scrub 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 scrub 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. Scrub 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, the scrub or amethystine pythons can make for very alert, active, and rewarding display or personal animals that are often an overlooked and underrated 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****

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.

*Copyright Madison Area Herpetological Society, 2017

<http://www.madisonherps.org>