



WOMAS AND BLACKHEADED PYTHONS

DESCRIPTION:

The genus *Aspidites* includes the blackheaded python and the Woma python. Average size for the blackhead is approximately 1.5m but they can reach 2.6m. Average size for a woma is 1.5m but they can reach 2.3m. Both species are variable in colour. Black heads and womas from the far western parts of their range are known for their high contrasting patterns.

DISTRIBUTION:

The blackheaded python occurs across the humid northern half of the continent and the woma occurs across the dry arid interior. Their ranges overlap in far western Australia in the region of Port Hedland where the great sandy desert stretches to the coast.

ECOLOGY:

Both are terrestrial nocturnal snakes that live in burrows. Both include a significant proportion of reptiles in their diets. This probably explains why they are the only Australian pythons without obvious thermo-receptive (heat sensing) pits lining their lips. The blackheaded python occurs across the hot humid top of Australia and requires some heat all year round. It has been speculated that the black head of the blackheaded python is to enable it to absorb heat more efficiently. In support of this theory, it has been observed in the wild with just the top of its body protruding from its burrow. Womas can tolerate much lower temperatures than blackheads although on really cold mornings in mid winter they will emerge to bask.

DIET:

Prey includes mammals, reptiles and birds. In some areas, reptiles may form more than 50% of the diet.

BREEDING BIOLOGY:

Both species produce one clutch of eggs in early summer. Mating occurs during winter cooling. Clutches range in size from 7 to 10 with black head eggs being slightly larger than woma eggs.



CAPTIVE HUSBANDRY:

Black headed pythons require more heat and are more difficult to breed than womas but essentially their requirements for captive husbandry are very similar. Enclosures for these pythons should be at least half the length of the snake and contain a sturdy hide box. Newspaper makes a good substrate. Snakes should be fed weekly during the warmer months and males will probably go off food during the cool down and cycling period starting around late April. Females should continue to be offered food until they refuse it signaling that they are gravid.

These pythons can benefit from exposure to UV light for a few hours a day so you should provide a commercially available full spectrum 5% UV bulb if sufficient natural light does not penetrate the tank. Cage decorations should be heavy duty and well anchored as both the black head and woma have a tendency to rearrange things. Hatchlings, particularly baby black heads can be difficult to get feeding. Many tricks are at the keepers' disposal including scenting mice with various prey items. Live rat pups and baby quails work well for stubborn babies.

Do not keep babies together as they may eat one another.

Black heads and Womas will live for up to 20 years in captivity.