



**Pythons of Australia:
A Natural History**

**Geordie Torr, Eleanor Torr
(Illustrator)
2000
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Malabar, FL**

This book is a very comprehensive study of the pythons of Australia. It is divided into the following chapters: History, Anatomy and Physiology, Behaviour, Reproduction and Life history, Food and Feeding, Conservation and Management, and Captive Care. The book also contains sections on species accounts and a two-page suggested reading list.

I found this book very easy to read and very informative. Despite the fact that the species information is limited to Australia, the general information on pythons is very useful. Torr begins by discussing the evolution of snakes from fossil records forward, highlighting some of the changes that snake anatomy has gone through over time. There is a discussion on taxonomy noting current terminology for some of the python species whose generic name has been recently changed i.e., Chondropython to Morelia.

The anatomy and physiology section is complete with drawings of the pertinent sensory anatomy of the rostral portion of the head including the Jacobson's organ and a whole body drawing of internal anatomy.

The behaviour chapter is quite interesting and covers such topics as activity patterns, courtship and mating, and combat. It continues by discussing home ranges, locomotion and thermoregulation. Throughout the book, numerous studies have

been cited to lend credence to the information, and in this chapter, the tracking studies are quite informative. There is also a sketch of land use from a radio-tracking study of diamond pythons which shows how these animals use different areas of home range in a seasonal fashion depending upon their reproductive status.

The Reproduction and Life History chapter contains valuable information such as gestation and incubation times, egg laying behavior and average clutch sizes, just to name a few. Reproductive success, color change, sexual dimorphism and sex ratios are also covered. Once again, field studies lend support to the information in the chapter.

The center of the book contains 34 color plates that are of high quality and depict different pythons for identification, feeding activity and hatching.

The Food and Feeding chapter brings to light a variety of foraging practices and types of the different Australian pythons from caudal luring by green tree pythons and worms to ambush foraging. The modification to the snake skull and body with regards to prey selection is also discussed.

The book rounds out with Conservation and Management, Captive Care, Species Accounts, Suggested Reading and the index. Each of these sections contains useful information. The species accounts are complete with range maps, habitat and diet information, descriptive information, and commentary unique to the species being described. The suggested reading section is more than adequate for anyone that would like to continue searching for pertinent and related information on pythons.

This book would be an asset to anyone that has an interest in snakes especially if they have a specific interest in pythons. The information contained in the book, the easy to read format, and the color plates make this book very desirable to have for reference material or to increase knowledge.

Reviewed by Nancy A. Carpenter, DVM

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