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This handout is intended to provide only very general guidelines. Consult with your veterinarian about other aspects of advanced care that can be considered to ensure adequate health.

General Information

Ball pythons have become popular pets due to their small size and generally friendly demeanor. Captive breeding has produced a wide range of coloration patterns and color morphs such as pastel, mojave, pinstripe, spider, enchi, lesser bee, etc. Adult female ball pythons can grow up to 5 feet in length! Hands should be washed after every encounter, as ALL reptiles, even perfectly healthy ones, can carry **salmonella**.

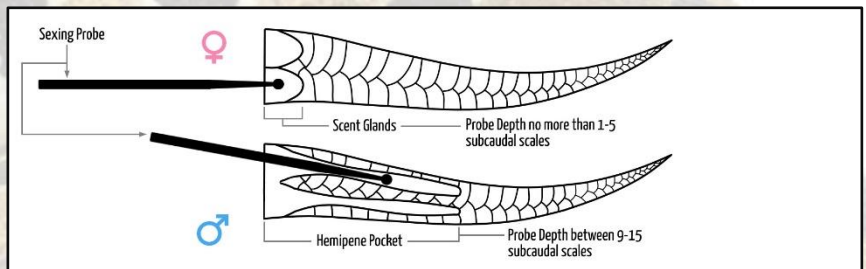
Lifespan

With adequate husbandry and diets the average ball python can live up to 20-35 years.

Sexing

The most common way to determine the gender of snakes is to have them probed. This is the process of inserting a small metal probe into the cloaca and then the depth of the probe is measured (by the number of scales it advances) to determine if it is a male or a female.

The probe will travel further in a male as it will enter the hemipene pocket. Probing should only be done by experienced professionals as damage can be caused to the cloaca and/or genitalia if improper technique or equipment is used.



Housing

Ideally your snake should have enough room to stretch the entire length of its body straight without touching the ends of the enclosure, however many snakes can do well in smaller habitats like 40-50 gallon tanks. The lid of the enclosure needs to be properly secured as snakes can stretch to the top of even tall tanks and forcibly push a lid off to escape. The cage should contain at least two hides that have only one opening (not the half logs) and allow the snake to fit snugly within it. Lack of appropriate hides may cause stress. Only one ball python should be kept per cage.

Substrate

Newspapers, paper towels or artificial turf like reptile carpet can be used for minimal mess and clean up. Aspen shavings, mulch, and soil allow burrowing but are more difficult to clean and can harbor mold or bacterial growth if not cleaned regularly. Sand and cedar or pine shavings should be avoided.

Lighting and temperature

Reptiles are ectotherms (cold-blooded), meaning that they need to absorb heat from their environment to regulate their own body temperature. The basking spot should be around **85-90 °F** and the cooler end of the cage should be kept around **75-80 °F**. A thermometer should be placed at both ends of the cage or an infrared laser thermometer can be used to accurately

measure temperatures. Ball pythons do not require UVB lighting, however there is emerging evidence that they may benefit from it. Providing UVB should be considered.

Water

A shallow water dish big enough for your whole snake's body to fit in curled up should always be available and fresh water should be added daily. Snakes enjoy full body soaking but often defecate in their water, so it needs to be cleaned often.

Humidity

Humidity in the enclosure should be 50-60% and should be monitored by a hygrometer. Inadequate humidity will affect your reptile's ability to shed its skin properly and can predispose them to respiratory infections.

Diet

Ball pythons only eat rodents as their food source. Young ball pythons should be fed once weekly, while adults can be fed every other week. Prey should be no bigger in circumference than the snake's girth at mid-body. Feeding thawed frozen prey is preferred as live prey can cause unwanted aggression and may even cause harm to your snake. Frozen prey should be thawed in hot water- do not microwave prey. Frozen prey should also be used within 6 months of feeding.

Snake weight (grams)	Prey weight (grams)	Prey size	Frequency of feedings
80-200	12-20	Rat fuzzy or Small mouse	5-7 days
200-299	22-34	Rat pup or Medium-large mouse	Weekly
300-499	35-44	Weaned rat or 1 XL or 2 large mice	Weekly
500-699	55-74	Small rat or 2-3 large/ XL mice	Weekly
700-999	75-99	Large small to smaller medium rat	7-14 days
1,000-1,499 (female)	100-149	Medium rat	10-14 days
1,000+ (male)	75-99	Large small to smaller Medium rat	>14-21 days
1,500+ (female)	120-165	Medium rate	>14-21 days

Common Medical Conditions

Respiratory Infections

- Bacterial, viral or fungal causes
- Extremely contagious
- Clinical signs include wheezing or clicking with breathing noises, bubbles from the nose or mouth, frequent yawning or open mouth breathing, holding head pointed upwards while resting, getting substrate stuck in the mouth, and not eating.
- Not all signs need to be present to be consistent with respiratory infection. Since so many infections are viral in origin the treatment with antibiotics is not always successful.

Not Eating ("hunger strike")

- Can persist for weeks to months and depending on the cause and may or may not be a major health concern.
- It is not uncommon for ball pythons to stop eating during certain times of the year, generally in the winter months, or during a shed.
- Continue to offer prey every few weeks, review and optimize husbandry, and reduce handling until it is interested in eating again, as the snake will eventually resume feeding normally. If weight loss or any other health problems are observed, then it is recommended to seek veterinary care.

Ectoparasites

- Mites are very common in snakes and appear as reddish-brown insects present underneath the scales

- Mites are contagious so quarantining affected animals and use of proper disinfection protocols should be followed

References

Animal Hospital in Centennial, CO. Aurora Animal Hospital. (n.d.). <https://www.auroraanimalhospital.com/>

Divers, S. J., & Stahl, S. J. (2019). *Mader's reptile and Amphibian Medicine and Surgery*. Elsevier.



Albino



Axanthic



Banana / Coral Glow



Black Pastel / Cinnamon



Blackhead



Butter / Lesser



Calico / Sugar



Chocolate



Clown



Confusion



Cryptic



Desert Ghost



EMG



Enchi



Fader



Fire / Lucifer



Genetic Stripe



Hidden Gene Woma



Hypo



Leopard



Malum



Mojave



Odium



Pied - Piebald



Pinstripe



Spider



Spotnose



Ultramel



Woma



Yellowbelly/Spector/Asphalt/Gravel