

Indian python

The Indian python (*Python molurus*) is a giant snake belonging to the family Pythonidae, and inhabiting mainly forests and woodlands on the Indian subcontinent. Its average adult length is 13 feet (4 meters), but individuals can grow to more than 20 feet (6 meters), making this the third longest snake in the world.

The long, triangular head has a blunt snout. The eyes are rather small, with vertical pupils. The sturdy body is covered with small, iridescent scales. Coloration is pale tan or gray with a bold pattern of squarish brown blotches outlined in yellow. A prominent arrow-shaped design on the crown of the head, pointing forward, distinguishes the Indian python from the somewhat similar reticulated python, *P. reticulatus*, which overlaps its range.

The Indian python is a versatile, adaptable snake that can live in a variety of habitats but is never far from water. It often basks in the fork of a tree in the daytime and becomes active from dusk to dawn. It preys mainly upon small mammals, birds, and other reptiles, often traveling alongside rivers and swimming in slow waters. It crawls into villages and fields in search of rats and farmyard animals. Heat-sensing organs in its lips can detect any object whose temperature exceeds that of the surrounding environment. These organs are a useful adaptation for locating prey. Like all pythons, the Indian python is a sit-and-wait predator. Rather than pursuing prey, it waits until the prey is within range, then grasps the victim in its teeth and kills by constriction. However, the Indian python has a calm temperament and is easily tamed.

Indian pythons are prolific. Clutches of 25 to 50 eggs are not uncommon and clutches of up to 100 eggs have been reported. The female pushes the eggs into a pyramid with its coils and remains tightly wrapped around the pile until they hatch, leaving only occasionally to drink. The female raises her body temperature during incubation, possibly creating heat by rhythmically twitching her muscles. Hatchlings are about 18 to 24 inches (46 to 61 centimeters) long, depending on the size of the mother.

Once very common, the Indian python has been extensively exploited for the leather and pet trades. Both subspecies, the Indian rock python (*P. molurus molurus*) of southwestern Asia, and the Burmese python (*P. molurus bivittatus*) of southeastern Asia and Indonesia, are now endangered. The Burmese python is bred in captivity and can be purchased from reputable dealers. It is darker than the Indian rock python, with reddish brown blotches. Selective breeding has propagated an albino Burmese. It has a white and yellow pattern and is known as the golden python. (See also pythons.)

Critically reviewed by David Cundall

Additional Reading

Cite

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"Indian python." *Britannica School*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 7 Dec. 2019. [school.eb.com/levels/middle/article/Indian-python/311798](https://www.britannica.com/school/levels/middle/article/Indian-python/311798). Accessed 16 Dec. 2019.