



Get to know Western Australia's fauna



## Carpet Python *Morelia spilota* (Lacépède, 1804)

### Size

Averages 2.0 m total length, though individuals have been reported to 4.0 m in length.

### Weight

*Morelia spilota imbricata*

Males  
Up to 1.1 kg

Females  
Up to 4.5 kg



Photo: Babs & Bert Wells/DEC

### Subspecies

Three subspecies are currently recognised:

- *Morelia spilota imbricata* (southern Western Australia and eastern South Australia)
- *Morelia spilota spilota* (eastern NSW and lowland New Guinea)
- *Morelia spilota variegata* (remainder of range including northern Western Australia)

### Description

Colour patterns vary across their geographic range. In Western Australia, the colour varies from pale to dark brown, with blackish blotches or variegations, which may form cross bands. Belly is white, cream or yellow, unmarked or with bold black blotches. Head tends to be paler.

### Other Common Names

None recognised.

### Distribution

*Morelia spilota imbricata*

This subspecies inhabits temperate climatic areas with good winter rains and dry summers. It occurs in south-west Western Australia, from Northampton, south to Albany and eastwards to Kalgoorlie, and

including undisturbed remnant bushland near Perth and the Darling Ranges, Yanchep National Park, and Garden Island. Populations also occur on St Francis Island (South Australia), and islands of the Archipelago of the Recherche (Western Australia).

*Morelia spilota variegata*

Distributed across South Australia, Victoria, inland NSW, Queensland, Northern Territory, and the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

For further information regarding the distribution of this species please refer to [www.naturemap.dec.wa.gov.au](http://www.naturemap.dec.wa.gov.au)

### Habitat

*Morelia spilota variegata*

Occurs in mesic (areas with moderate amounts of moisture) to semi-arid habitats, from the Kimberley region to northern Victoria.

*Morelia spilota imbricata*

This subspecies has been recorded in semi-arid coastal and inland habitats consisting of *Banksia* woodland, eucalypt woodlands, and grasslands.

### Behaviour

In the summer months, the Carpet Python is active either at night, or at dawn and dusk. In cooler months it may be active during the daytime and occasionally has been seen to bask in the sun on cool days. It is arboreal, terrestrial, and rock-dwelling. In some areas it shelters in burrows made by other animals, hollow tree limbs, or rock crevices. Favoured logs are often 150 mm in diameter, with a hollow section that usually extends for at least one metre. Both sexes have a well-developed spur to stimulate mating. On Garden Island, *Morelia spilota imbricata* is active throughout the year, although larger females are sedentary in winter. At Dryandra, pythons remain inactive for several months during winter, where they may shelter in tree hollows for up to five months.

In spring, the home ranges (area of occupancy) of males increase as they search for females. In eastern Australia, males will often fight with each other to gain mating rights over a particular female. A female will usually lay her eggs inside a log, and coil around her eggs for up to 60 days. If the temperature of the eggs drops too low,

the female python will shiver to generate heat to elevate the temperature of the clutch. Radio-tracking indicates that pythons have a preferred home range.

## Diet

Pythons strangle their food, and swallow it whole. The diet includes a variety of terrestrial vertebrates (mammals, birds, lizards). In captivity, this species readily consumes mice, rats and chickens. On Garden Island (Western Australia), *Morelia spilota imbricata* has been observed feeding on geckos, house mice, doves, and small Tamar Wallabies. At Dryandra, dietary items include Woylies, Numbats and Purple-crowned Lorikeets.

## Breeding

Little information is known about the breeding of this species. Females have a single ovulation in late spring or early summer. Limited data indicates that between 14-35 eggs are deposited in a sheltered site. A clutch of eggs can weigh up to 25% of the female body weight. Hatching occurs 63-71 days after laying. Young are independent as soon as they hatch, and disperse away from their nest in search of food and establish their own home range.

## Threatening processes

The loss of bushland habitat for land developments and agriculture, and changed fire regimes, have all impacted upon populations. Habitat destruction has been implicated in the decline of *Morelia spilota imbricata* populations in the Esperance area. The role of direct predation by exotic predators (foxes, feral cats) in the decline of python populations in Australia remains uncertain. Circumstantial evidence shows that densities of pythons are higher in areas where exotic predator control occurs.

## Conservation status

- *Morelia spilota*

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

Least concern

- *Morelia spilota imbricata*

Western Australian Wildlife Conservation Act 1950

Schedule 4 – Other specially protected fauna

## Management

- Survey of known and potential habitat of the subspecies within and outside reserves.
- Develop and promote guidelines and provide incentives for landowners and users to reduce the impact of current land use practices on this subspecies.
- Study the ecology of populations in Western Australia

## Other interesting facts

- Female Carpet Pythons in south-west Western Australia grow up to four-times larger than males at maturity. This is believed to occur because females need to store large amounts of fat to reproduce.
- In a reproductive year, females may not eat for up to eight months.

## Selected references

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### Further information

Contact your local office of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

See the department's website for the latest information: [www.dec.wa.gov.au](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au).

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