

Woma Python

Aspidites ramsayi (Macleay, 1882)

Size

Averages 1.5 m total length, although individuals have been reported to reach 2.7 m in length.

Subspecies

None recognised

Description

Distinguished from other Australian pythons in possessing a narrow head rather than a broad head distinct from the body. Grey, olive, brown or rich red-brown above, often lighter on sides, usually with several darker olive, brown to black cross-bands which are normally narrower than the lighter interspaces. These bands may fade with age. Belly cream to yellow, with numerous pink or brown blotches.



Photo: R. Syme

Other common names

Sand python, Ramsay's python

Distribution



Key To Map: Black = present distribution

Populations extend from central Australia into the southwestern edge of Queensland, and into northern South Australia. Other populations are known from the Pilbara coast, north to the Eighty-mile Beach area, and south-west Western Australia, from Cape Peron south and east to the eastern Goldfields.

There are very few recent records of the woma within the southern parts of its range.

Habitat

The woma occurs in the arid zones of Western Australia, favouring open myrtaceous heath on sandplains, and dunefields dominated by spinifex (*Triodia* spp.).

Behaviour

A nocturnal, terrestrial python, it shelters in hollow logs, animal burrows or thick vegetation during the day. Both sexes have small spurs that are used to stimulate mating.

Diet

The diet includes a variety of terrestrial vertebrates (small mammals, ground birds and lizards).

Breeding

Based on a few captive individuals, mating occurs from May to August. Eggs are deposited in September and October, and hatching occurs between two and three months

later. Two females have been found to shed their skin 23 days before depositing eggs. The average clutch size in captivity is 14 eggs (the range is usually five to 19 eggs), a clutch of 22 eggs has been recorded. Incubation lasts approximately 57 days.

Threatening processes

Populations have been affected by clearing of habitat for agricultural development and grazing. There is a significant possibility that fox predation has contributed to population decline.

Conservation status

2000 IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals

Endangered

Western Australian Wildlife Conservation Act

Schedule 4 (Specially Protected Fauna)

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act

Not Listed

Management in Western Australia

- Surveys should be conducted on known and potential habitats within and outside reserves for populations of woma.
- Develop and promote guidelines and provide incentives for landowners and users to reduce the impact of current land use practices on this species.

Other interesting facts

- The woma was, and still is, a prized food item of desert Aboriginal people. Hunters follow the track of a woma to its burrow and then dig out the prized meal.

Selected references

Cogger H.G. (1992). Reptiles and amphibians of Australia. Reed Books Australia.

Barker, D. G. and Barker, T. M. (1994). Pythons of the world: Australia. Vol. 1. The Herpetological Library, USA.

Pearson, D. (1994-95). Pythons - Masters of the waiting game. *LANDSCOPE* 10(2): 17.

Bush, B., Maryan, B., Browne-Cooper, R., and Robinson, D. (1995). A guide to the reptiles and frogs of the Perth region. University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, Western Australia.

Website links

http://www.naturebase.net/projects/west_shield.html

<http://www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au/woma.html>