herpy

SNAKES

Black-headed Python

Aspidites melanocephalus

Aspidites melanocephalus is a powerful, nocturnal python from northern Australia with a glossy black head and a black neck. It grows to 150-200 cm, lacks the heat-sensing pits that otherwise characterise pythons, and in the wild lives mostly on lizards and other snakes. All animals in the trade are captive-bred. It is calm, but can eat other snakes and must be kept alone.

Family: Pythonidae Former name: *Aspidiotes melanocephalus*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**150-200 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**20-30 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and savanna**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**180 × 90 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**26-28 °C**
Basking spot	**33-35 °C**
Temperature, night	**22-25 °C**
Humidity	**50-70%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Optional** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**30-60 months**
Clutch size	**6-20 eggs**
Incubation	**58-65 days** at 30-32 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	An adult *Aspidites melanocephalus* needs an enclosure of at least 180 × 90 × 60 cm (length × width × height). The species grows larger than *Aspidites ramsayi* and is active, so larger is better.
TEMPERATURE	The enclosure must have a clear gradient. The cool side should be 26-28 °C, and the basking spot 33-35 °C. At night the temperature may fall to 22-25 °C (the figure is borrowed from *Aspidites ramsayi*).
HUMIDITY AND WATER	Humidity should be 50-70% (the figure is borrowed from *Aspidites ramsayi*). Ventilation must be good, and the substrate must not be wet, because constant moisture causes blisters and scale rot.
LIGHTING AND UVB	The species is nocturnal and does not require UVB. Weak UVB (Ferguson zone 1) can be used as long as there are hides and shade; the recommendation is borrowed from related nocturnal pythons. Use a timer and a dark night.
FEEDING	Adults readily take rats, and they are given frozen and thawed, because this is safer for both snake and keeper.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	*Aspidites melanocephalus* is calm and easy to handle but can strike with a closed mouth when it feels threatened. Juveniles and snakes in shed, when the eyes are covered, are the quietest.
NATIVE RANGE	Australia.