MEET THEM AT PLUMPTON PARK ZOO

# BALL PYTHON

*Python regius · also called royal python*

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## Fast facts

| | |
|---|---|
| ANIMAL GROUP | Reptile: python (a constricting snake) |
| NATIVE REGION | West Africa and the Central African Republic to Sudan and Uganda |
| HABITAT | Grasslands and sparsely wooded areas |
| DIET | Carnivore: small mammals such as rats, shrews and mice |
| LENGTH | Adults about 3–5 ft (rarely 6 ft) |
| WEIGHT | Adult females about 3–4 lb |
| LIFESPAN | About 10 years in the wild; about 20 in human care |
| STATUS | Near Threatened (IUCN Red List, 2022) |
| OUR PYTHON | Nagini |



Photo: Brian Gratwicke, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

## Did you know?

- It is the smallest of the African pythons.
- Its name comes from curling into a tight ball, with its head tucked inside, when it feels threatened.
- Heat-sensing pits along its lips let it find warm-blooded prey even in total darkness.
- It has no venom. It holds prey in its coils and swallows it whole.
- A female lays about 7 eggs and coils around them for about two months, until they hatch.

## Words to know

**Constrictor:** A snake that holds its prey tightly in its coils.
**Clutch:** A group of eggs laid together.
**Hatchling:** A young animal that has just come out of its egg.
**Near Threatened:** Close to being at risk of disappearing from the wild.

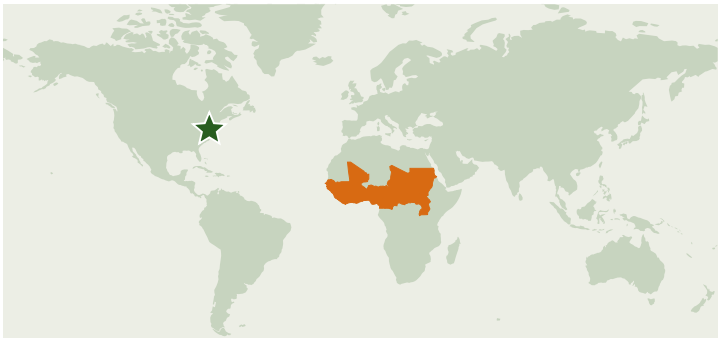
## Think about it

1. Why is it called a ball python?
2. How do the pits on its lips help it hunt in the dark?
3. How does a ball python catch its food without venom?
4. How does a mother python care for her eggs? How is that different from a sheep caring for her lamb?
5. Why should you check the date when you read an animal's conservation status?

## Draw it

Draw a ball python curled into a defensive ball. Label its head, lip pits, scales and coils.

## Where it lives in the wild



Lives in the wild ★ Plumpton Park Zoo, Rising Sun, MD

**STANDARDS · GRADES 1–4** **WRITTEN FOR GRADES 3–5**

Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **4-LS1-1 · 1-LS1-2**
Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.4.A · 3.1.1.B**

*Draw here*

**Learn more:** https://plumptonparkzoo.org/reptiles-and-amphibians/ · **Sources:** Animal Diversity Web (University of Michigan); IUCN Red List, amended 2022 assessment; Aubret et al. 2003; VKM, python trade assessment 2023
**Supports Maryland and Delaware (NGSS) and Pennsylvania (STEELS) standards:** 4-LS1-1 (3.1.4.A) · 1-LS1-2 (3.1.1.B)
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FIELD TRIP WORKSHEET · PLUMPTON PARK ZOO

# BALL PYTHON

*Before and after your visit*

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## Before you visit · 5 minutes

Name: _____ Date: _____

**1. Predict: where in the wild does the ball python live?**
Circle one (or more if it lives on more than one):

Africa | Asia | Australia | Europe | North America | South America

**2. Predict: what does it eat?**
☐ plants ☐ other animals ☐ both

**3. Word hunt: find these words on page 1. Put a check by each one you already know.**
☐ Constrictor ☐ Clutch ☐ Hatchling ☐ Near Threatened

Pick one word and write what it means in your own words:

_____

_____

**4. My question: one thing I want to find out when I see the ball python.**

_____

_____

## At the zoo · look closely

**Watch for one minute. What is it doing?**
☐ resting ☐ eating ☐ moving ☐ watching ☐ with others

**Draw or describe one body part that helps it survive, and say how it helps.**

*Draw here*

## After your visit · talk it over

**1. Check your prediction.** Native region: West Africa and the Central African Republic to Sudan and Uganda. Was your guess right?
☐ yes ☐ no ☐ partly

**2. Diet check.** The fact sheet says: Carnivore: small mammals such as rats, shrews and mice. What did you learn about how it finds or eats food?

_____

_____

**3. Discuss with a partner, then write your best answer.**

- How do the pits on its lips help it hunt in the dark?

_____

- How does a ball python catch its food without venom?

_____

**4. Exit ticket.**

One thing I learned: _____

One thing I still wonder: _____

**ADJUST IT**
**Grades K–2:** talk and draw instead of writing; read the questions aloud. **Grades 6–8:** add evidence from the fact sheet and the animal page to every answer.

**Learn more:** https://plumptonparkzoo.org/reptiles-and-amphibians/ball-python/ · Fact sheet page 1 has the fast facts, map and vocabulary this page refers to.
**Grades 1–4** · Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **4-LS1-1 · 1-LS1-2** · Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.4.A · 3.1.1.B**

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