

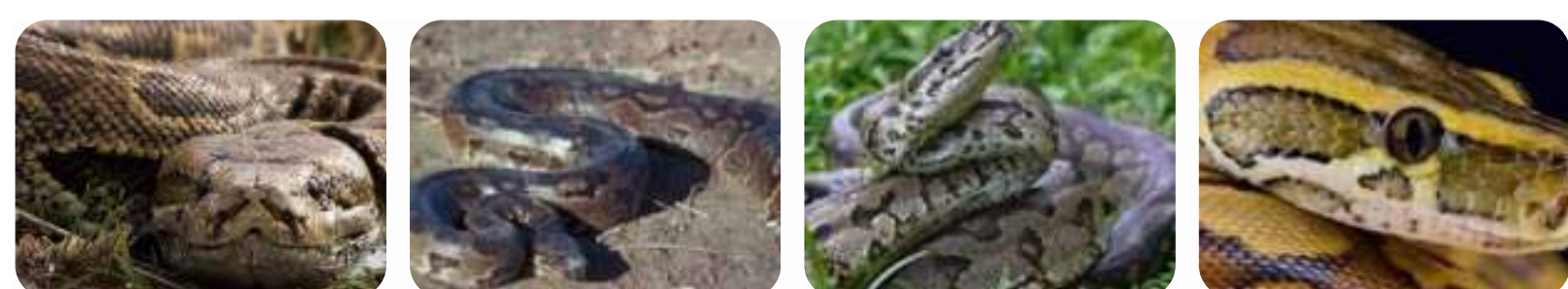


# African Rock Python

Common name: African Rock Python

Latin name: *Python sebae*

Local name: Assala - أصلة



## ECOLOGY

### Type:

Wild

### Role in Ecosystem:

The African Rock Python plays an important role in maintaining biodiversity through what it eats and what it gets eaten by. It eats mammals for their meat, and it is also provides a food source of meat for a wide variety of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and other reptiles. It is a large and long lived animal in the right environment.

## HABITAT

Snakes are cold blooded creatures which means they rely on their environment to maintain their body temperature. They seek out places to warm up, or stay cool, hide for protection, or become invisible while they watch and wait. This snake thrives in Sudan where there is sufficient prey and water, like evergreen forests and moist, open savannahs near rivers and lakes. It is a good swimmer and can stay submerged in water for a long time, or it can be found hiding and waiting in the shadows of rocky outcrops. During the dry season it becomes dormant.



### Food

Carnivore

These reptiles catch their food by hunting. They lie in wait, suddenly strike and quickly coil themselves around their prey in a fearsome embrace. They catch and eat rats, poultry, dogs and goats, among other mammals, not excluding humans. A large adult snake can eat an animal weighing up to 59 kg, so heavier than itself. Like crocodiles, the snake has a very long digestive system that can slowly process its food for days or weeks. It has a wide hinged jaw so it can swallow animals whole. Its large recurved teeth help lock its prey in place, as well as inflicting a nasty bite, and the two pits in the scales by its upper lip help it breathe while eating.



### Movement and Communication

Snakes glide through the landscape by slithering their smooth scaly bodies in ripples of movement that can be as effective in water as they are on land. Their weight and balance are evenly spread and their movement looks continuous. This snake is heavy and stays low. Its small eyes are set in a triangular head and work better at night, but it depends on its sense of smell to read its environment and communicate with other snakes. As it moves it flicks its tongue from side to side collecting chemical signals, which it absorbs in a sensitive organ in its mouth. This organ allows the snake to smell its surrounding world, to track prey, sense approaching predators, and communicate with other snakes by collecting the chemical cues they emit. It can be aggressive if cornered.



### Social Habits

Solitary

This snake is a solitary hunter that only seeks out its own kind during the breeding season and it does not form lasting bonds. On its own from the moment it hatches, the snake has to rely on its instincts to survive. Only a small proportion of hatchlings get to live a long life.



### Reproduction

Oviparous

The African rock python reaches sexual maturity at around three years. Breeding is during November to March. Like other reptiles, the females lay their young as embryos that develop in leathery skinned eggs.

- The eggs are usually laid in tree hollows, termite mounds, animal burrows or other hollows.
- The eggs are quite large, often weighing 130 to 170 grams, and about 100mm in diameter.
- During the breeding season, both males and females cease feeding, with females continuing to fast until the eggs hatch.
- Large females can lay as many as 100 eggs and coil around them for warming and protection.
- The young snakes hatch after up to 80 days and are immediately independent.

## Attributes

### Appearance:

African Rock Pythons are very large, stout snakes with two mostly continuous and irregular dark blotches down the back that are bordered by black and white. The coloration is grey-green/-brown and it has a long triangular head, a sturdy body, and a short tail.

### Size:

&gt; 20 feet / 6m

### Weight:

55 to 65 kg (121 to 143 lb) or more, some individuals may reach 91 kg.

### Lifespan:

18 - 27 years

## INTRODUCTION

The African Rock Python is the biggest snake in Africa. In Sudan it is found in forests and savannahs near lakes and rivers, commonly in Kordofan, Kassal and Blue Nile, where its green or brown blotches and black bars provide it with a good camouflage for hunting prey at night. The long thick muscular body of the python is designed to squeeze its prey to death by constriction. It also provides a large decorative scaly skin highly prized by leathersmiths, particularly for the production of traditional shoes called *markoub*.

## LIVELIHOODS AND CULTURE

### Human interaction

Although pythons can be bred in captivity, they have to be managed as single specimens and are therefore valued as long-lived exotic pets. Encountering a 6m long specimen in the wild requires caution as even their bite is painful and can cause nasty infections. Hunting and capturing a mature python for its skin and meat requires expertise. They are good at hiding and dangerous.

### Cultural value

In Sudan the African Rock Python is most familiar in the plural (Arabic: مراكوب; *markoub*) form of traditional shoes, or *markoub*. These are made and sold in the markets as top-end luxury shoes, one down from leopard skin, which are illegal to hunt. Although many types of snake can be used for their leather or eaten, the size, colour and patterning of this python is the most prized by shoemakers. The skins can also be dyed and used to make bags, purses and other items. Although the real snakeskin patterns are individual and distinctive, they are also copied onto a variety of other fabrics, types of leather and plastic.

### Cultural expression

Snakes in general evoke strong reactions in people, even harmless ones. Their lack of limbs and singular body covered in scales, silent movement and ability to strike quickly, have had iconic value in stories and myths from time immemorial. The main feature of this snake is its strength and size. Their alien qualities are fascinating and they are still used in charms, magic rituals or ceremonies that attract watchers.

## THREATS

- Habitat loss or disturbances from climate change
- Habitat loss or disturbance caused by human incursions such as deforestation.
- Hunting for their skin and meat by humans

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