Antaresia Maculosa

Iris Haring 2002

Authority: Peters, 1873

Common Name: Spotted Python

Description (Cogger 2000; Ehmann 1992; Gow 1989; Queensland Museum 2000; Readers Digest (Aust) 1997): Although great colour variation exists among individual Antaresia maculosa, all display the same light coloured brown body with the darker brown blotches that often combine to form vertical lines across the snake's head and tail. The snake's ventral surface is paler and does not display the distinguishing blotches. Unlike other pythons A. maculosa retains its distinctive spotted markings through out its life. It is the largest of the four species found in this genus. It can reach a maximum length of about 1 meter although the average length is around 75-85cm. Previously placed in the Liasis genus, it can now be found listed under the genus Antaresia, which all display similar facial characteristics such as large dorsal head scales, 2 or more loreal scales, teeth on the premaxilla and heat sensory pits on the infralabials – a distinctive trait only displayed on the Family Boidae. Mid body scales consist of 35-45 scales and ventral scales count 245-290. It has a single anal scale and some subcaudals are also single. However, most are found to be divided. Scales are glossy and smooth.

Similar Species (Cogger 2000; Mattison 1995; Readers Digest (Aust) 1997). A. Childrenia of the same genera is the most similar to A. Maculosa. So minute are the differences that until 1985 they were considered one and the same species. Other species displaying similar physical and behavioural characteristics include A. Perthensis and A. Simsoni (again found in the same genera as Antaresia Maculosa) and various species of the genera Liasis (to which the above 4 Antaresia were previously taxonomically related). Although sharing many similar features with the species of the genus Liasis. They are often significantly larger than A. Maculosa and will often lack the distinct, clearly defined darker splotches for which A. Maculosa is so well known.

Range (Cogger 2000; Ehmann 1992; Mattison 1995; www.thereptionwshed.com/spotted%20python%20natural%20history.htm): Found on the north east to eastern coast of Australia, from the tip of Cape York Peninsula Qld, along the great dividing ranges and down into northern NSW and on various small islands just off the coast of Queensland.

Ecology and Behaviour (Ehmann 1992; Mattison 1995; Swan 1998; www.natcon.dircon.co.uk/phythons_antaresia.htm): A. Maculosa inhabits mainly dry woodlands where it is often found along river banks, in trees and tree hollows, termite mounds, rock crevices, grottos and cave entrances, where it can be observed clinging to the rock face only by its tail, waiting for bats on their evening exodus. The snake will catch the bats in flight and consume them in mid air. As well as preying upon bats, A. maculosa is also known to feed upon other small mammals, birds and reptiles. Young A. maculosa will feed almost exclusively on small lizards which they kill (as do all pythons) by means of constriction. Coiling its body around the prey, the python prevents it from inhaling and inhibits the pumping action of its heart. Death

follows as a result of either one or the other, or as a result of both. The snake then consumes its prey whole by holding it in position against its own body and 'walking' its jaws around and down the length of the carcass. As A. Maculosa is only a small species, non-venomous and reluctant to bite, it posses potentially no danger to humans.

Breeding Biology (Ehmann 1992; Glasby et al. 1993; Gow 1997; Mattison 1995) Mating which usually involves an elaborate and lengthy courtship occurs from April to August. After copulation the female is often reported to refuse food. After laying an average of 10 eggs (oviparous) the snake will coil itself around the clutch defending and effectively incubating them by "shivering". The ability to regulate incubation temperatures is a uniquely Pythoninae trait. During the gestation period females are known to leave the nest only occasionally in search of water. This she consumes and carries back to the clutch (in her cloaca). Where she can be observed re-hydrating her eggs. Hatching occurs after about 80 days. The young cut through the leathery egg shell with the aid of an egg tooth. Young may remain in their shells for up to 48 hours absorbing the remaining egg yolk and fluids. When the young emerge they do it simultaneously. This unusual phenomena is expected to increase the individual chance of survival against preditors. Newly hatched A. maculosa are around 250mm in length and have been observed to feed exclusively on lizards.

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