

Green Tree Python Care

Morelia viridis



Green Tree Pythons are the dream of many reptile hobbyists. They are one of the most stunning species of snake known to the pet trade; a real gem of the rainforest. Green Tree Pythons are arboreal (tree dwelling) and nocturnal (active at night), making this species incredibly difficult to find in the wild and highly valuable. As the name suggests, this species is predominantly green in colour, although some individuals may be blue or yellow with flecks of white, black and yellow. Babies are born yellow or red with white and black flecks. This species is native to New Guinea and its surrounding islands, reaching as far south as the Northern Tip of Australia in the Cape York Peninsula.

As the reptile industry has progressed, keeping this snake has become easier and easier. The old tales regarding the extreme difficulties keeping this snake alive have been thrown out the window, and with enough time, effort and money spent, this species is easy and incredibly exciting to keep. In this care article I will explain exactly how this is possible.

Housing

When keeping any snake as a pet, you generally want to be able to view the snake from the outside of its enclosure in the most natural surroundings you can offer. A naturalistic setting will be more aesthetically pleasing to your eye and also aid in the general condition of the snake. If the snake likes its surroundings, it will have a better feeding response and generally grow quicker. A larger terrarium also offers more interest to the snake's life, and by adding branches and other natural products you will enhance the quality of life the snake has, and stop it from becoming lethargic and overweight.

For an adult Green Tree Python, a vivarium 90cm Length x 60cm Width x 60cm Height is ample. Many keepers opt for 60cm cubed vivarium or one which is vertically shaped rather than horizontal. Providing they have a minimum of 60cm cubed, I do not feel it is too important which shape is provided. Green Tree Pythons are fairly timid and need

to feel secure at all times. Too large an enclosure may scare the snake, yet an enclosure too small will not allow good exercise nor will it be easy to obtain an appropriate temperature and humidity gradient. Juveniles should be housed in smaller enclosures; 30cm cubed is a good size. As they grow, so should their enclosure and if you feel your python will adapt and prefer a larger vivarium, I urge you to consider giving it that opportunity.

Snake enclosures can be made from a number of materials. Most commonly used is a melamine coated wood which covers all sides except the front, which has glass sliding doors. Aquariums can also be used for juvenile snakes, although a specialist lid should be bought or made rather than the original aquarium lid. It is essential when thinking about what type of enclosure you use, you think about these 6 'SSSHHH' factors:

Safety – Can the snake or owner injure itself from the enclosure or any appliances held within?

Secure – Can the snake escape through any small hole or cavity?

Size – Will the enclosure be appropriately sized?

Heating – Is the enclosure able to regulate the temperature properly?

Humidity – Will the enclosure last well in humid conditions? Is there enough ventilation?

Hygienic – Will the enclosure build up a lot of bacteria in small cavities? Is it easy to clean?

Green Tree Pythons have become such a prized possession for reptile hobbyists that specialist brand vivarium designs have been built specifically for them. These are usually plastic or fiberglass, but melamine and glass are also common. Providing the following steps above are taken into consideration, you can have a suitable enclosure made from a variety of materials.

Décor

Décor in your terrarium serves two purposes. First being extra cover for your snake and second, allowing for a more natural and pleasing appearance for yourself. When choosing décor, think about the safety of the snake. Make sure that whatever you decide to use, it is securely fixed and that no rocks, wood or anything heavy can fall and possibly injure, or even kill the snake. You must also make sure that everything used is parasite free. If anything has been picked up from outside, or has originally come from outside, such as cork bark, you should wash it thoroughly with a strong cleaning fluid.

If you decide to go for a large enclosure, you must provide plenty of cover and hiding areas. Green Tree Pythons do not typically hide under or in objects like most snakes do; instead, they may choose to sit on a branch situated amongst foliage or with the sides of the enclosure around them. There are many brands of fake plants and décor you can use which is both safe for the animal and pleasing to the eye. Cork bark is available from almost any reptile pet shop in the UK, and can be ordered in if they do not have it in stock. This is excellent cover for any reptile and is 100% natural. One thing you must consider when thinking about the size of the vivarium, is the bigger you go, the more hiding areas you must provide. For Green Tree Pythons, I do not recommend a particular number of hides, although it is important to provide several 'sitting' spots around the vivarium.

NOTE: Never use sticky tape in an enclosure; this is an accident waiting to happen. Believe me; removing sticky tape from any snake is no easy task!

Substrate

As Green Tree Pythons are arboreal, I do not feel much of an importance on how the snake should react to a substrate. Rather, how the substrate reacts with the enclosure is more important. Newspaper is cheap, easily disposable, soaks in moisture and will also dry out easily. This is for me the easiest and best substrate for Green Tree Pythons. Aspen, bark chips and other wood chips can also be used, but be sure that no mould is allowed to grow and that regular cleaning takes place.



Heating

Green Tree Pythons require a very slight thermal gradient within the vivarium, meaning they must be allowed to move around the enclosure to find their required temperature. The hot end of the enclosure should be 86-90°F while the cool end should be approximately 75-78°F. The ambient air temperature should be around 84-86°F. During the night, a slight decrease in temperature by a couple of degrees is acceptable but not necessary.

In my opinion, the ideal way of heating a Green Tree Python's enclosure is to use a Ceramic Heater. The **WhitePython™ Ultra Slim Ceramic Heaters** are the ideal choice as it gives off ample heat but equally doesn't take up too much space in your terrarium. Ceramic heaters do not give off light and therefore in a terrarium you will need a form of lighting as well. To regulate the temperature accurately you should use a suitable thermostat. The **WhitePython™ Pro Control 2 Thermostat** will allow you to regulate the ceramic heater with a separate day time and night time temperature and also allow you to time your light to come on during the day.

Power Plates, spot bulbs and heat mats are also ways of heating a terrarium. These all have their advantages and disadvantages, but in my opinion, none quite weigh out to be as good as ceramic heaters for large enclosures.

Lighting

Green Tree Pythons are primarily nocturnal, meaning they venture out in the dark of night. This is when their main predators are sleeping, and their prey is awake. This is not to say though, that they never see the sun, or any form of lighting for that matter. They will often bask in the sun during the day in the wild, so lighting should be offered.

Having artificial light in a terrarium is aesthetically pleasing to the owner, and is a good addition to a snake's enclosure. They will use this as a photo-period, and their regular time clock will generally adjust to the settings on which you have your light set to.

They do not require any form of special lighting, such as a D3 Ultra-Violet light commonly used for diurnal species.

The **WhitePython™ range of LED lights** are a great way to light your enclosure whilst using minimal electricity. They are also very slim and therefore do not obstruct your view into the terrarium. What's more, they are available in virtually any length you require. If you would like to go a step further and see your snake's activity during the night, you could use the **Moonlight Blue** or **Nighttime Red** versions of the LED lights.

Humidity & Water

This is one of the most important parts to keeping this species, and one which many are confused about. When keeping any snake, I always research the native country to which that snake comes from, and then the habitat in which it decides to live. With this in mind, it is possible to recreate the snake's environment and successfully enjoy keeping and perhaps breeding your reptile.

Green Tree Pythons are a rainforest dwelling species native to the most Northern tip of Australia and New Guinea. These places have high humidity levels all year round, although it obviously fluctuates greatly from day to night and month to month. It is therefore not important to have exact humidity levels all the time. Rather; it is more important to fluctuate the humidity level and offer dry patches as well as high humidity patches.

Humidity levels vary depending on the temperature of the cage and the ventilation offered. Enclosures that keep high humidity levels all the time are more damaging to a Green Tree Python than enclosures which dry out too quick. It is not important to give a level of humidity, although I suggest that an optimum level of high humidity is reached every day or two, and then allowed to slowly dry out. Misting the cage and substrate is a perfect way of achieving this. Be sure that the cage itself is not too wet; humidity is not dependant on how wet your enclosure is, but how much water vapour is held in the air. If stagnant water is sitting at the bottom of your vivarium, this may cause more harm than good.

Many Green Tree Pythons are not observed drinking from a bowl; instead they are seen drinking from water droplets when misting the cage or from water dripping systems. Most individuals will happily drink from a bowl which is regularly changed, although I suggest with emaciated individuals not observed taking on water, that a drip system is put in place.

Feeding

Juvenile Green Tree Pythons are capable of feeding on pinky mice. As they grow, so should their food. I recommend using a food item no larger than the girth of the snake. The girth is the diameter of the widest part of the snake, which should be the middle part of the body. Hatchling Green Tree Pythons should be fed once a week on one or two appropriately sized food items. As they grow, their food should too increase in size, but not in quantity. As an adult, their food intake can slow down to once every two or three weeks, and a larger rat or mouse should be offered. Green Tree Pythons have a very slow metabolism and obese individuals are regularly seen in captivity. Some individuals roam more than others and some are handled more than others, so feeding should depend on each snake and not the species as a whole. It is perfectly acceptable, particularly for male Green Tree Pythons to eat once every six weeks or so, providing of course they do not lose weight.

By Chris Jones, Founder of WhitePython™