

BOIDAE



Pythons are harmless snakes with neither fangs nor venom. They possess several rows of sharp teeth, which they use for securing their prey before killing it by constriction. First they bite and hold onto their prey with their teeth. Then they quickly wrap their coils around the victim's body. They don't crush their prey or break the ribs as people sometimes believe; pythons merely apply sustained pressure so that the victim is unable to inhale and suffocates. Like all other snakes, pythons swallow their prey whole. Their teeth are also used in self-defence.

The current understanding is that pythons originated in the Australian region, possibly within Australia, then later diversified and spread to Asia and Africa. Pythons are generally regarded as a primitive group of snakes, sharing many primitive features such as oviparity (egg laying), labial pits, retention of the left lung and remnants of the pelvis and femur (apparently relics of hind limbs). The only externally visible parts of these vestigial hind legs are the tiny spurs that look like a pair of claws, one on each side of the cloaca. Male pythons use these claws in male-to-male combat and to stimulate females during courtship. Female pythons possess smaller spurs but their function is not evident.

Australian pythons occupy a wide range of habitats. They occur in most parts of the continent except for the cold south-east corner of Victoria and in Tasmania.