



PYTHONS FROM THE TOP END

ROUGH-SCALED AND OENPELLI PYTHONS

Although both the rough-scaled and the Oenpelli pythons were well known to the Aboriginal people of the Top End, both species were discovered and described scientifically only relatively recently. The Oenpelli python is recognised as the second largest Australian python or may even be on par with the lengthy scrub python. It is quite ironic – and some say, ‘This can only happen in Australia’ – that this huge snake was only described in 1977. This nocturnal species probably escaped the keen eyes of herpetologists because it is only found in relatively inaccessible parts of the Arnhem Land escarpment in the Northern Territory.

When first collected, the rough-scaled python was thought to be just another form of the carpet python. It came to light as a distinct species and was officially described in 1982, six years after the type specimen was collected and just five years after the Oenpelli python was described. Again, the remoteness of its habitat, and perhaps its rarity, were responsible for this species eluding naturalists. Morphologically, the rough-scaled python differs from other members of the *Morelia* group because it possesses keeled scales. It also has extra long teeth and quite a nasty disposition when handled or disturbed. It is endemic to the deep sandstone gorges of northern Kimberley, Western Australia, where it occupies patches of monsoon vine forest.