

Woma



Woma habitat © Craig Eddie

Description

The woma is a large, stocky, python with an average length of 1.5 metres but can grow to 2.7 metres. It is a glossy yellowish or reddish brown to a pale greenish brown with prominent banding and dark patches above the eyes. Large adults sometimes lose these bands and dark eye patches as they get older. The belly of the woma is cream to yellow with numerous pink or brown blotches. This is one of only two pythons in the world lacking heat sensitive pits along the lips.

Distribution

The woma is widespread throughout arid and semi-arid Australia. In Queensland it occurs in the dry subtropics from the Northern Territory border east to the Miles/Glenmorgan area. Core populations are found within the Mulga Lands and Brigalow Belt South bioregion.

Habitat

The woma is a habitat generalist, occurring in a broad range of habitats. These include: (a) rocky ridges vegetated by narrow-leaved ironbark, mountain yapunyah, ooline, bendee or lancewood, (b) mulga/poplar box/silver-leaved ironbark woodlands on sandy and loamy red earths, (c) white cypress pine, bulloak, carbeen, poplar box woodlands on sandy soils associated with levees along major watercourses eg. the Maranoa and Balonne Rivers, (d) brigalow/belah woodlands on clay soils (rarely) (e) poplar box woodland on alluvial flats or low hills with clay, loam or stony substrates, and (f) spinifex grasslands or open woodlands on deep sandy soils.

Ecology and Life Cycle

The woma is generally considered nocturnal. However, it can sometimes be encountered basking in the sun. Unlike other types of pythons which are skilled climbers, the woma is a ground dweller. It takes shelter within hollow logs, animal burrows or thick herbage during the day. In the evening and at night the woma forages for ground birds, small mammals (including hares and rabbits) and other reptiles.

An egg layer, the woma lays up to 22 eggs. It incubates and protects its eggs by coiling its body around the clutch almost continually until they hatch.



Scientific Name:

Aspidites ramsayi

Conservation Status

Endangered - IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (International)

Appendix II - *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species* (International)

Rare - *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Queensland)

This species is non-venomous but has been observed eating venomous snakes.



Juvenile woma © Steve Wilson



Woma habitat © Craig Eddie

Key Threats

Loss of habitat due to clearing and thinning: The focus of vegetation clearing in the Brigalow Belt is shifting from the essentially cleared Brigalow ecosystems on fertile soils to the eucalypt woodlands on poorer soils. Consequently the survival of dry woodland/open forest species with limited geographic ranges and/or specialised habitat requirements, such as the woma, remain uncertain unless conservation action is undertaken.

Ripping of rabbit warrens: The practice of ripping rabbit warrens has been known to kill womas, as well as destroying an important shelter site for this species.

Inappropriate roadside management: Roadsides and road reserves often provide suitable reptile habitat. These areas are often islands of native vegetation in a fragmented landscape providing important refuge sites. Management practices of these remnants should reflect the multi-use nature of these areas.

Feral animals: Juveniles are at risk of predation from pigs, foxes and feral cats.

Road deaths: Some populations of womas are particularly prone to mortality from vehicle traffic.

Misidentification: Womas are frequently killed at property homesteads and other areas, often as a case of mistaken identity with venomous snakes.

Illegal collecting: The woma is very popular in the reptile collecting trade, with illegal collecting potentially impacting on populations of this species.

Did You Know?

Unlike most other pythons, such as the familiar carpet python, the woma's head and neck are about the same width as the body.

This is one of only two pythons in the world lacking heat sensitive holes along the lips. Most pythons have heat sensing pits to hone in on warm blooded animals and birds. However, because the woma goes after reptiles which don't radiate heat in the cool of the night, it doesn't need the heat sensing apparatus.

This species is non-venomous, however it is an unusual python because it actually likes to eat other reptiles; venomous snakes in particular.

How to help

- Leave snakes alone. They are protected under Queensland legislation and it is illegal to harm them or interfere with them, not to mention potentially dangerous.
- Implement coordinated feral animal control measures.
- Monitor for the presence of reptiles using rabbit warrens before undertaking warren ripping practices in known woma areas. Use other control measure if possible.
- Maintain large, healthy, connected patches of native vegetation across the landscape.
- Retain fallen timber, including stacked timber piles, and ground cover as these provide essential habitat.
- Ensure grazing practices are sustainable, maintaining good ground cover.
- If burning, use cool burns in a mosaic pattern that promote patchiness and leave areas of ground cover unburnt.
- Consider entering into a conservation agreement (e.g. Land for Wildlife, Nature Refuges or incentive agreements through grant programs) for conservation and land management assistance.
- Report sightings to WWF-Australia, the Queensland Museum or the EPA/QPWS.

To find out more about saving threatened species check out www.wwf.org.au/tsn or contact the Threatened Species Network at tsn@wwf.org.au.



The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

