



Giant snakes, monitor lizards and crocodilians are potentially dangerous due to their large size, strength, physical characteristics, and temperament.



A wide variety of reptile pets are potentially dangerous due to their large size and strength. They include the largest of the constricting snakes, monitor lizards and crocodilians.

Every year, large constricting snakes (i.e., boas and pythons) are responsible for a number of human injuries and deaths. Often referred to as the “giant snakes,” they may grow in excess of four meters. Boa constrictors, Indian pythons and the occasional Reticulated python are the species most commonly found in the pet trade.

The majority of giant snake attacks are believed to occur when a snake has mistaken a hand or arm as food. Snakes have a good sense of smell, so food odours on a body part may trigger an attack. Snakes may also bite if they feel threatened. A bite can result in serious puncture wounds and lacerations.

When a constricting snake bites, it holds onto its victim with rows of recurved teeth. It then coils itself around the grasped body part, or if the prey is small enough, around the entire body, tightening its grip each time the victim moves or exhales. At some point, the victim dies of asphyxiation. The snake will then start swallowing its meal head first.

The snake is difficult to pry off the victim as the recurved teeth hold the head secure. In fact, trying to remove the snake may result in the snake clenching their jaws more tightly. Hitting the snake will also not cause the animal to release its grip.

A number of snake attacks have resulted in human injuries and deaths. For example:

- In 1992, a Brampton, Ontario man was killed by his pet python. Apparently, he was handling the snake while drunk when it attacked him, coiling around his neck.
- A 10 foot long, 80 pound Burmese python killed a 43 year old man in Aurora, Colorado in 2002 after the snake became aggressive while being handled.
- In August 2001, an 8 year old girl died after one of her family’s five snakes, a 10 foot, 70 pound Burmese python, escaped from its enclosures and wrapped itself around her neck.
- In Springfield, Illinois in 1999, a 7 ½ foot African python escaped from its enclosure and wrapped itself around a 3 year boy sleeping next to some relatives. The boy died of asphyxiation.
- In 1995, a 23 year old Edmonton man was attacked by his unidentified 5 ½ metre python resulting in multiple puncture wounds and lacerations.



[continued on reverse]





Giant Reptiles Should Not Be Kept As Pets

In 2001, the potential danger posed by giant snakes was brought to national attention when media reported on a British Columbian woman who allowed her nine children, including a nine month old baby, to play with their 5 ½ metre, 63 kg Burmese python. Photographs in several newspapers showed two very young children sitting on their living room floor playing with the snake. The woman acquired the snake in 1997 and ran into problems soon afterward. She was contacted by the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development who were quite concerned about the children being attacked and/or contracting salmonella from contact with the animal.

The woman claimed her snake had never bitten anyone and was as tame as a house cat. She dismissed the danger posed to her children and reportedly, continues to keep the snake in her residence according to certain rules dictated by the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Some reptile groups promote specific housing and husbandry guidelines for giant snakes because of the risk inherent in their keeping and handling.

Other Large Reptiles

Various kinds of monitor lizards, some growing to more than 2 meters in length, are common in the pet trade. These generally robust lizards are equipped with sharp claws and often aggressive tendencies. They are capable of inflicting relatively severe bite wounds and scratches and should be treated with caution. Savannah monitors and Nile monitors are two species most commonly found in the pet trade.

Adult crocodilians can be extremely dangerous. These large, powerful, often aggressive reptiles, can grow to lengths in excess of 4 meters. Caiman, the most common crocodilian in the pet trade, can reach 2.5 meters in length. These animals require very large enclosures and special handling methods.



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