1. **Always keep large constrictors in secure, lockable vivariums.**
   Snakes are notorious escapologists and the simple expedient of using a lockable vivarium is the single most effective measure of reducing risk of accidents. The use of a lock will also prevent children, other pets or unauthorised persons from removing the snake from the vivarium. Making sure the vivarium is robust enough to provide secure housing is also very important to prevent animals breaking out.

2. **Never feed large constrictors when reactions are impaired.**
   Most bites and injuries are received when feeding constrictors and in the vast majority of cases carelessness or impaired reactions are a factor. Consumption of alcohol, prescription or recreational drugs, tiredness or illness can all adversely affect reaction times and should be given due consideration when feeding constrictors.

3. **Never feed large constrictors without another adult present.**
   If a problem should arise being able to call for assistance is vital and will prevent the incident becoming elevated to a more serious level.

4. **Never allow unsupervised minors to handle large constrictors.**
   Children may think they are able to handle big snakes unaided but the small risk of accidents should be avoided and adult supervision is essential.

5. **Start small!**
   It may be tempting to buy the biggest snake you see, but is that wise? If you are inexperienced it is far better to start with a small juvenile snake that you can learn and grow with. Knowing the individual temperament and character of your animal is very important and buying an adult snake is a totally unknown quantity which could prove to be a very unwise investment.

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Do join your local herp society where you will be able to get help and advice from experienced keepers

Check out the more detailed care guides on the FBH Website at: www.fbh.org.uk

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Reptile and Exotic Pet Trade Association
Introduction

Choosing to keep any pet is a very big decision and it is important that prospective owners consider the implications prior to making a purchase. Choosing to keep a snake which may grow extremely large is a particular responsibility which should not be entered lightly and the Federation of British Herpetologists advise that prior to purchase the guidelines in this Code of Practice should be taken into account.

Keeping large constrictors can be extremely rewarding and making the correct choice of pet snake is paramount to good husbandry, human safety and animal welfare. Most of the measures suggested in this guide are based on nothing more than good common sense and by adopting the recommendations in the Code of Practice the small risks associated with the ownership of large constrictors can be reduced to a negligible level.

Safety implications

When considering keeping large constrictors safety of the keeper and the public is paramount but it is important to keep the risks in perspective. In the UK, for example, there are over 7,000,000 reptiles kept as pets, of which an estimated 200,000 are constrictors (pythons & boas), but there have been no deaths or serious (life threatening) injuries by large constrictors in the past 100 years. By contrast, sixteen people (mainly children) have been killed by pet dogs since 2005, with hundreds more seriously injured or maimed for life.

Accident and Emergency statistics show that reptiles are among the safest pets, with just 74 instances of injury logged in 2011-2012. During the same period there were 6,640 hospital admissions for dog bites and 2,738 bites from other mammals.

Responsibilities of the Keeper

These snakes are large and long-lived (in excess of 20 years) and the prospective keeper must ensure they can house and look after the animal for its entire lifespan. Constrictors grow fast and a hatchling Burmese may attain 10 feet in just a couple of years, so keepers need to gain competency in handling and feeding techniques to prevent accidents or future problems. Buying a small animal is preferable to starting with a larger or adult specimen whose temperament is unknown. Choosing the correct species is very important, rock pythons and anacondas, for example do not make good snakes for inexperienced handlers.

Safety of the public and other family members is the no. 1 priority, so vivarium security is the top issue. The vivarium or enclosure must be large enough for the occupant(s) and should be fitted with a secure locking device to prevent escapes.

Take care note of the Golden Rules and always think hard and do your research before buying.

Finally, never buy a large constrictor on impulse.

The Big Four

Green Anaconda (Eunectes murinus):
- Range: South America, mostly Amazon basin and Trinidad
- Avg. Adult Size: 4.5m (15’), max recorded length: over 8.5m (28’)

Reticulated Python (Python reticulatus):
- Range: Southeast Asia
- Avg. Adult Size: 5.4 m (18’), max recorded length: around 9m (30’).

Burmese Python (Python molurus):
- Range: South and Southeast Asia
- Avg. Adult Size: 4.5 m (15’), max length: around 6m (20’).

African Rock Python (Python sebae):
- Range: Sub-Saharan Africa
- Avg. Adult Size: 5.4m (18’), max recorded length: over 7.5m (25’).

The world’s longest snakes, retics are extremely fast, feisty and intelligent. Their feeding response, in particular, is lightning-fast which potential keepers need to be aware of. Retics are, arguably, the most attractive of the large constrictors, with many morphs now produced. Dwarf forms, which only attain around 10 feet are also available.