

Green Anaconda

Eunectes murinus

Classification

Class: Reptilia
Order: Squamata
Family: Boidae
Genus: *Eunectes*
Species: *murinus*

Distribution

Guiana, throughout tropical South America east of the Andes, and in the Amazon and Orinoco river basins.

Habitat

Slow moving streams in tropical rainforests, swamps and marshes.

Physical Description

- The largest snakes in the western hemisphere and the heaviest snakes in the world – adults range between 20-25 feet (6-7.6 m) long and up to 550 pounds (250kg). Females are much larger than males.
- The head of the anaconda is large and narrow without much distinction between head and neck.
- Eyes are small with vertical pupils and oval irises that help them see better at night.
- Anacondas have sharp, re-curved teeth allowing ease of eating large prey.
- Their bodies are dark green with alternating oval black spots along the back, and black spots with yellow centers along the sides of their bodies.

Diet

What Does It Eat?

In the wild: Green anacondas are carnivores preying on large animals including tapirs, capybaras, deer, peccaries, fish, turtles, birds, aquatic reptiles, dogs and sheep. Although rare, there have been some documented attacks by anaconda on jaguars and humans

At the zoo: They are fed rabbits.

What Eats It?

As a top predator itself, this animal's primary predators are humans.

Social Organization

Anacondas are primarily solitary, except during breeding season, but have been observed to form small groups in some instances.

Life Cycle

Green anaconda breeding season corresponds with the rainy season (generally in December and January) in South America. During this time females in breeding condition begin to give off pheromones, a chemical scent, which is tracked by nearby males. Several males may attempt to approach the same female up to 12 males can move over and around one female – a grouping called a breeding ball. The males compete physically by pushing each other. Courtship can last several months and breeding usually takes place in April and May. Courtship and copulation usually take place in the water. The male presses his body to the female and rests his head on her neck. Gestation is approximately six months. Anacondas are viviparous, bearing live young. Females usually give birth to 20 to 40 babies, but can give birth to up to 100 babies. Anacondas are approximately two feet long at birth. Within hours after birth, anaconda babies can hunt, swim and care for themselves. They feed mainly on frogs and fish until they have grown enough to hunt larger prey. Because of their relatively small size at birth, many anaconda babies are prey to other animals. Anacondas grow quickly, until they reach sexual maturity at three to six years of age. They continue to grow after this age, but at a slower rate.

Adaptations

Predatory Snake

The eyes and nostrils of the anaconda are located on the top of their heads, which allows them to remain nearly completely submerged while stalking prey. They can stay completely submerged for up to 10 minutes. Water helps support their extreme weight enabling them to swim at considerable speed. They have extremely keen senses as well as a Jacobson's organ to aid in the location of their prey. Although they are cumbersome on land they sometimes hang from trees and attack prey. These snakes do not use venom to immobilize their prey!

Crushing Force!

Anaconda can swallow prey much bigger than their heads because their jawbones are only loosely connected to their skulls. Flexible cartilage connects the two pieces of the lower jaw. Anacondas are constrictors; they suffocate their prey by coiling around it and squeezing until the prey can no longer breathe. They then swallow their prey whole. The prey of an anaconda is rarely crushed; broken bones can be dangerous for the snake as it ingests its food. While anaconda eat, powerful muscles make wave-like contractions that aid in crushing their prey and pushing it further downward inside of their bodies. Despite their size and their powerful muscles, anacondas are wounded by their prey on a fairly frequent basis.

Special Coloration

On first glance the Anaconda may not look perfectly camouflaged to its environment. With the dark green color and blotches of black and pale yellow this snakes actually blends in to its watery environment very well. The blotches help the animal blend in with the aquatic vegetation of the streams this species inhabits.

Conservation Connection

IUCN Status – Least Concern

The most serious threats to Island flying foxes are habitat loss due to deforestation and over hunting. They are hunted as a food source and are considered such a delicacy that they are even illegally exported. Because they roost in noisy colonies, bats are easy to find and kill. They are also killed because of the damage they cause to fruit orchards.

Fun Facts

- Green anacondas are the largest snakes in the western hemisphere and the heaviest snakes in the world.
- The pattern of scales found along the underside of the tail is unique and can serve as a method of identifying individual snakes.
- An anaconda may consume 300 times its daily food requirement with just one meal.
- In captivity, anacondas can go without food for months. One captive anaconda did not eat for over two years.