

## Ball Python Diet and Feeding

### What can I feed my ball python that is not a rodent?

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

What can I feed my ball python that is not a rodent? I don't think I could handle watching a poor mouse, rat or other rodent dead and being eaten. Could I maybe feed it crickets or eggs, or something else than a poor once living animal?

Oh, boy! I once had a young girl write to me whose mother wouldn't allow her to keep any rodents, alive or frozen, in her home and she had a pet boa. She wanted to feed her snake nothing but fish.

It is a fact of life (for you and your snake), that these types of snakes have been consuming rodents (among other things) for quite a long time and this should be a staple of the boa and python diet. While these snakes can and do consume birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles from time to time in the wild, for the most part, the majority of their prey items come from the rodent family. Boas and pythons will not eat crickets or eggs. They are carnivorous animals and should be consuming appropriate-sized rodents for proper nutrition. That is the basic fact of owning one of these types of snakes.

The only other suggestion that I have for you is to try a type of "snake sausage." This is a nutritionally complete and balanced food that comes in a sausage-style shape meant to feed snakes. These products were introduced several years ago, and honestly, I cannot remember when I saw one of these products advertised last. They just didn't take off. Acceptance by snakes that were used to consuming (and genetically programmed to accept) rodents primarily didn't happen on any large scale. It was hard to convert a snake, used to the smell of rodents, to consuming a foreign smelling and shaped potential food item. You can check around and see if any companies are offering this type of food item for purchase anymore.

Boas and pythons are carnivores, and are meant to consume rodents. If you can't or won't feed your snake an appropriate diet, then you must make a decision if a ball python is the right pet for you. You cannot turn it into an egg-eating snake, or a fish-eating garter snake, as that is not what a ball python is. Many people that find feeding a snake a just-killed rodent unsavory or inhumane, are able to purchase pre-killed, frozen rodents of appropriate size for feeding their snakes (once they have been converted over to eating dead prey). Do you think that you would be able to feed your ball python pre-killed frozen, defrosted prey?

If not, then I urge you to rethink owning a ball python. I'm sorry to be so blunt, but there is no point in mincing words. You cannot turn your ball python into something it is not. If you truly cannot feed your snake rodents, then perhaps you should find yourself a different pet. Guinea pigs make great pets! So do bearded dragons (they eat vegetation and insects). But other than egg-eating snakes, all other snakes consume live prey of some type, in the wild. That's just the way it is.

Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP has been an avian/exotic/herp animal veterinarian since 1981. She is a regular contributor to REPTILES magazine.

### Need a Herp Vet?

If you are looking for a herp-knowledgeable veterinarian in your area, a good place to start is by checking the list of members on the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarian (ARAV) web site at [www.arav.com](http://www.arav.com). Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.