

## Snake Identification

### How do I tell the difference between a reticulated and Burmese python?

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

Last December I rescued a male python, which was between 7 and 11 years old. His owner thought he was a boa. When I got him he was 8 feet long and had not been fed in four months. His normal feeding schedule was two or three small rodents every three months. He now eats two to three large frozen rats a week and has grown 7 inches in three months. In general he is a very friendly snake and has only struck at me once, which was my fault.

After checking dozens of sites on the Internet, I have him narrowed down to either a reticulated or Burmese python. How do I tell the difference?

Any hints or help you could give me would be greatly appreciated.

Well, without a photo to help you identify your snake, my gut impression is that you probably have a Burmese python. Retics are known for their nasty temperament and are the largest of the snake species, but I doubt if you want to wait that long.

Burms have very distinctive brown squares as their predominant pattern, and retics have a less-distinctive pattern. They are grayer, black and white. I think the burms' big brown squares make a very attractive pattern.

If you have a digital camera, take a photo and show it to a knowledgeable pet store person or snake breeder for a definitive identification. Or you can ask a pet store clerk to see a burm and a retic, so you can compare them to your snake. I think they are quite distinctive in their appearances and temperaments, so you just need to get them sorted out in your head. Then you will know which is which!

I hope this helps you identify your snake. While retics have the reputation of being mean and aggressive, I have known a burm or two with decent temperaments. Of course, I haven't discussed the many color mutations, including albino, which might make identification of your snake more difficult. It seems there are new color morphs being developed daily. But as far as wild-type snakes go, you should be able to distinguish between a burm and a retic.

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### 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.