



# GREEN ANACONDA

**SQUAMATA**  
**Family: Boidae**  
**Genus: *Eunectes***  
**Species: *murinus***



**Range:** Tropical South America, east of the Andes in Amazon & Orinoco basins, and the Guianas, north to Trinidad

**Habitat:** Prefers aquatic lifestyle in sluggish, still waters; swamps, back-river systems.

**Niche:** Aquatic, some terrestrial, carnivorous, primarily nocturnal

**Wild diet:** Capybara, deer, fish, turtles, caiman, dogs

**Zoo diet:** mice, rats

**Life Span:** 15-20 years in the wild, up to 30 years in captivity

**Sexual dimorphism:** Females 1/3 larger than males

**Location in SF Zoo:** South American Tropical Rainforest and Aviary

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS

The Green Anaconda is dark green with alternating oval black spots. There are similar spots with a yellow-ochre center along the side of the body. The head is large and narrow and is not distinct from the neck. The eyes and nostrils are on top of the head so the snake may be submerged while hunting. Its body is extremely stocky compared to other constrictors and it is extremely muscular. It is the heaviest snake in the world. The pattern of scales found along the black and yellow underside of the lower tail are unique to each snake and may be used for identification.

**Weight:** Up to 550 lbs  
**Length:** Up to 29 feet  
**(record: 37 ½ feet)** Center of body may be up to 12 inches in diameter.

The cloaca has no scales and contains glands, which emit a toffee-colored musk, which is poisonous to small organisms, such as ticks and leeches. The quadrate bone that is in the jaw allows the snake to open its mouth wide enough to allow eating animals with a larger diameter than the snake. The anaconda has a slow-acting digestive system; it often takes days or weeks to digest its food. After a meal, an anaconda may not eat for as long as two years. Anacondas shed in one piece.

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION:

No special status, as little is known about the species. All anaconda trade is prohibited in most South American countries. Some export live snakes to zoos, research, and the pet trade to fill quotas. Some illegal trade occurs but the “dull” color isn’t popular for trade. This snake has no real predators because of its size. However, human encroachment is the main problem and they are being hunted for their skin to be used for shoes, handbags, etc. Locals usually kill them on sight because of ignorance. The Venezuelan Wildlife Department (PROFAUNA), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES), and the Wildlife Conservation Society in a joint effort are conducting the first field study on the anaconda. The main purpose of this study will enable wildlife officials to decide whether or not a conservation program based on commercial harvesting will be viable.

## GREEN ANACONDA

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### COMMUNICATION & OTHER BEHAVIOR

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The anaconda is a nocturnal snake and spends much of its time in the water; it is also known as the “water boa.” Due to its large size, it may seem sluggish on land, but in the water it is capable of surprising speeds both on the surface and under water. It has extremely keen senses and uses its tongue by flicking it to test the environment and search for prey. It usually waits in the water with only its snout extending above the surface; it will grab prey and constrict in the water to suffocate the animal or just drown it. On land it will usually hang from a tree and grab the prey from above. The prey is rarely crushed, simply suffocated.

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### COURTSHIP & YOUNG:

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Courtship may extend over several months. Females are thought to emit pheromones to attract males. Often up to 12 males will cluster into a “breeding ball” by twining around the much larger female. Mating generally occurs during April and May. Males use the spurs near their cloaca to stimulate the female’s cloaca. She accepts a male by raising her cloacal region to meet his. Courtship and copulation usually take place in the water. After mating the female may eat one or more of its mating partners. This behavior may help it to survive pregnancy, during which food is not taken for up to seven months.

Gestation for the anaconda is approximately six months. They are ovoviviparous, bearing anywhere from 20-40 live young. The young snakes are about two feet long, are independent (able to hunt, feed, and swim shortly after birth) and do not need parental care. They grow rapidly and reach sexual maturity at about 3-4 years old.

Estrous: April - May	Sexual Maturity: F 3 - 4 yrs, M 18 mos
Incubation: 6 mos	Weight at birth:
# of young: 20 – 40 (may have up to 100)	Length at birth: 2 feet

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### MISCELLANEOUS:

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The name “anaconda” comes from the Indian language, Sinhalese, which originally referred to the reticulated python. No one is sure how this came to represent a South American snake, unless these two snakes, anaconda and python, were mistaken as the same species. Both snakes are swimmers and are two of the largest snakes in the world. The Tamil word for anaconda is “anaikolra” which means “elephant killer.” The early Spanish settlers referred to this snake as “matatoro” or “bull killer.”

The various biomes where anacondas are usually found are tropical rainforests, savannas, grasslands, scrub forests, and deciduous forests, although, they do prefer to be in water. On land they can become tick-infested and they cannot move as quickly as they do in the water.

#### Sources:

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