

Name: _____

Is That a Boa or a Python?

by Guy Belleranti

When people think of snakes, boas and pythons are two species that often come to mind. They're alike in so many ways that many people can't tell which is which.

Both types of snake use their forked tongues to smell. Those that hunt at night can widen the pupils of their eyes to let in more light. They also use heat sensors on their lips to find warm-bodied prey such as rodents.



Red-Tailed Boa Constrictor

When a boa or python captures prey, it wraps its muscular coils around it, and constricts, or squeezes. This shuts off the prey's breathing. The snake then opens its mouth wide and swallows the prey head first. Muscle contractions in the snake move the food along as the snake digests.

Some boas and pythons look so similar only a reptile expert, or herpetologist, can tell them apart. One example of this is the emerald tree boa and the green tree python.

So, how are boas and pythons different?

First, a boa's skull bones aren't arranged the same as a python's. Pythons have more bones in their skull, and more teeth too.

Second, boa young hatch inside their mother and are born live. This is unusual because most other reptiles hatch from eggs. Pythons, on the other hand, do lay eggs. The mother python builds a shallow nest made of leaves



Burmese Python

and soil. She coils around her eggs and keeps them warm and protected. When it is time for them to hatch, the mother python leaves and the babies must survive on their own without her help.

One other difference between boas and pythons is where each type of snake

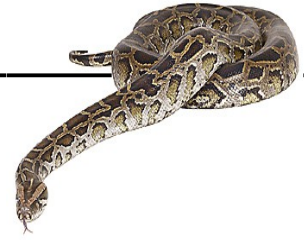
lives. Most boas are native to the Americas. Most pythons are native to Africa, Asia, Australia.

About the Author



Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.

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1. Which sentence best describes the organization of the article?
 - a. The author lists facts about boas and pythons in sequential order.
 - b. The author describes differences between boas and pythons, then describes similarities.
 - c. The author lists facts about boas and pythons in order of importance.
 - d. The author describes how boas and pythons are alike, then describes how they are different.

2. How do boas and pythons kill their prey?

3. A hiker is walking through the grassland in Africa and he encounters a large snake protecting its eggs. Is it probably a boa or python? Explain how you know.

4. What is a herpetologist?

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Use information from the article to complete the Venn diagram.



Pythons

Boas

ANSWER KEY

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2. How do boas and pythons kill their prey?

They wrap around it and squeeze until it stops breathing.

3. A hiker is walking through the grassland in Africa and he encounters a large snake protecting its eggs. Is it probably a boa or python? Explain how you know.

It is probably a python because pythons lay eggs and live in Africa.

4. What is a herpetologist?

a scientist who studies reptiles

ANSWER KEY

Is That a Boa or a Python?

Use information from the article to complete the Venn diagram.



Pythons

1. More bones in its skull
2. More teeth
3. lay eggs
4. build nests
5. live in Africa, Asia, Australia

BOTH

1. use forked tongues to smell
2. squeeze their prey to kill it
3. heat sensors on lips to sense mammals
4. pupils widen so they can hunt at night

1. Fewer bones in its skull
2. Fewer teeth
3. young are born alive
4. live in the Americas

Boas