

## **“Reptile Racks: Should Reptile Owners Utilize Them?”**

By Roxy Kinzer

In the world of ball python keeping, whether or not reptile racks are ethical has been quite the debate, especially since the popularity of reptile ownership has been on a rise since the 1980s-1990s. Reptile racks should never be an option due to a ball python’s need for multiple hiding spots, known as hides (warm and cool), which are known to help with their shedding process. Therefore, a reptile rack does not provide adequate space for this requirement. Also, ball pythons need to have floor space to allow lots of enriching items, such as foliage (e.g., branches, leaves, and the correct amount of substrate). Reptiles need to be in a terrarium, so that this ensures they are in an environment that is as realistic as it can be, despite being domesticated. Lastly, adult ball pythons have a minimum terrarium requirement of 48 x 28 x 28 (inches), whereas the average reptile rack size for an adult ball python is anywhere from 33.5 x 13 x 5.3 to 33.5 x 17.5 x 5.3 (Freedom Breeder). This information already simply shows that a reptile rack is not compatible; they do not give the proper amount of spacing for adult ball pythons and will not properly fit all of a ball python’s requirements.

As stated previously, a ball python needs two hides due to the need for thermoregulation (as reptiles cannot regulate their own body temperature), as two hides will allow the ball python to find a space in their tank that properly fits their needs. For example, “if you have a Ball Python in a tub or terrarium setup and only provide a hide on the warm end, chances are your snake will stay in the hiding place even when it feels too warm” (Freedom Breeder). Due to the measurements of the average sized reptile rack stated before, and due to personal experiences of reptile keeping, it is nearly impossible to fit multiple hides within a rack system to ensure a snake

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Fall 2024

can successfully thermoregulate. The failure to provide multiple hides due to lack of space in a rack system can disrupt a ball python's shedding process, as when the snake is ready to enter shedding, it will need a warm, moist hide to ensure the process of a comfortable shed. Secondly, according to Lena Adams, a self-proclaimed conservationist and wildlife enthusiast, "If your ball python does not have access to a hide, or if the hide is not suitable for their size or needs, it can lead to several issues such as stress, poor shedding, and refusal to eat. Providing a proper hide helps prevent these problems and promotes a healthy and happy ball python." There is simply no point in owning a pet if ensuring it a decent lifestyle is not something that is affordable.

Therefore, without proper sizing of a ball python's enclosure, the hides that are required for a ball python's tank will not be suitable, as reptile racks are widely known to fit at most one hide.

Ball pythons must have enough space to ensure some amount of enrichment is available. Ball pythons are wild animals and are known to climb and explore. Starting strong, ball pythons are known to need at least two to four inches of substrate (Smith). Interestingly enough, "Although ball pythons don't dig into their substrate, deeper substrate is better able to maintain the humidity that ball pythons require" (Smith). Rack systems typically are only 5.3-7 inches in height. Sure, it could provide enough spacing for the bare minimum of bedding required; however, after that, there is no space to provide enrichment. Furthermore, according to writer Andrea at Reptile Hero, in their article "13 Ways of Providing Enrichment to your Ball Python," "Providing ball pythons with elevated areas can also stimulate the part of their brain related to roaming. Ball pythons are proven to climb in the wild due to birds being a part of their diet so it is part of their normal behavior." Therefore, with only 5.3-7 inches of height within a rack, ball pythons will simply not have enough space for stimulation of their minds. It is simply not possible to ensure proper enrichment within a reptile rack.

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Fall 2024

According to Hunter Briggs in his article “Ball Python Care: Enclosure, Size, Lifespan, Diet & More,” “Adult ball pythons do well in enclosures that measure 36 inches long, 18 inches deep, and 12 inches tall.” On *Freedom Breeder’s* website, which is used to sell rack systems, they have a chart with rack sizes for all ages of ball pythons and what a rack requirement is. On their chart, they showed that the “footprint and dimensions” for an adult ball python range from “33.5 x 13.5-17 x 5.3 x 7” inches. None of these dimensions properly line up with the minimum length, depth, or height requirement for an adult ball python. How could there possibly be a reptile rack requirement differentiated from the standard requirements of adult ball python terrariums? Therefore, a rack should not even be a considerable option for reptile keeping. ;\

Although many reptile keepers reasonably argue that rack systems are used by breeders who own hundreds of snakes and need to find spacing for all of these animals vertically, how are breeder snakes any different than a typical pet snake? It is still the same species with the same exact requirements whether that ball python is used to breed or not. People argue that puppy mills are inhumane, so what is the difference in mass breeding ball pythons while not giving adequate enclosure spacing as people who mass breed dogs do? If a reptile breeder is simply unable to provide proper spacing for their ball pythons, why even bother breeding the snake and making the snake’s life a chaotic stressful mess? Future owners/breeders need to research the unethical side of reptile racks for themselves.

In short, without proper spacing to provide hides, enrichment, and substrate and give a decent enough life to a ball python to ensure it can live a stress free and healthy life, I suggest to never take in a ball python if without seriously considering the harmful lasting impacts that a reptile rack can cause. Without the proper housing requirements, ball pythons can have problems in regards to shedding, stress, and security. Do not take in a ball python if affording proper

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Fall 2024

enclosure spacing is an issue, even if reptile racks are advertised as cheap or a good alternative to a huge terrarium.

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Fall 2024

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