

SARAWAK PYTHONS

Python breitensteini

By Rich Crowley

What is the story with those "Sarawaks?"

The Sarawak short-tailed pythons are restricted to the northward-draining rivers of Sarawak, separated from the western Kalimantan borneos (location of most of the Borneos in the pet trade) by a very high mountain range barrier that represents the international boundary between Indonesia and Sarawak. At this time only six animals were collected from this region. Physically they are different from typical Borneo pythons, but until you see them it is hard to say what is so different about them.

The Sarawaks have more stoutness than a typical borneo without being overweight. The scales look and feel different with more texture than typical Borneo pythons. DNA gel electrophoresis analysis showed differences between Sarawak's and all other short-tailed pythons. All these differences combined differentiate them from other short-tails; however, taxonomically they are still referred to as *Python breitensteini*. The original imports were acquired from a Chinese restaurant in Kuching in the country of Kalimantan, a country know to be very difficult to export out of.

Currently, acquiring a Sarawak can only be done so from reliable sources for any discriminating collector. Since there are no reptile pedigree registrations, the tracing is done by acquiring the animal from reputable sources from the original founding stock or other reliable sources, which acquired captive offspring. To do this, one must understand the origin and history of the Sarawaks in captivity.

In 1989-1990, Dave and Tracy Barker received six animals from a Singapore animal dealer by the name of Tommy Cheng who was working with the Cincinnati Zoo at the time. To show his gratitude, Mr. Cheng sent a blood python from Sarawak, which the Zoo asked be sent to VPI. The original snake was a melanistic Borneo python collected in the city of Kuching. The Barkers were moved by this animal as it had an appearance unlike anything they had seen before and asked for more, if possible be sent. Before long, they received six more Sarawak Borneo Pythons acquired in a Chinese restaurant in the city of Kuching. Unfortunately for the Barkers, these animals were not as melanistic as the original one so after a year or two, these animals were sent to Chris Carmichael.

Chris successfully established and bred the Sarawaks in 1999 and continued to do so until around 2005. During the large most of this period, Chris was the only breeder of Sarawaks in the country. In 2003-2004, Bob Garby began producing offspring from a pair he purchased from Chris in 1999. In 1999, I also acquired two Sarawaks later turning out to be two female Sarawaks unrelated to each other and to Bob's animals. At this point there were three prospective breeding females unrelated to each other originated from the imported animals. In 2005, Chris Carmichael had an incident in his facility that led to the deaths of five of the original six animals. The lone surviving Sarawak was a female that was later given to Bob Garby in return he was to provide a

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male to me since I only had two females. Both the females were of breeding age, but Bob only had hatchlings available and thus the single male was raised up in hopes to breed to the two virgin females in my collection.

To my good fortune and that of the Sarawak population, in 2007 I acquired the last surviving imported Sarawak (female) and the entire collection from Bob Garby. The import female showed signs of anorexia and in 2008 was found dead in her enclosure. At this point she was estimated to be in excess of 20 years old having been in captivity since 1989. At the time of this writing I have four of the six bloodlines of the original-founding animals.

In 2008, I was able to successfully reproduce a clutch from an F1 male produced by Chris Carmichael used by Bob Garby to breed to his F1 female and the remaining original female import. The resulting clutch was small with only three eggs successfully hatching resulting in one female and two males. In 2009, I was able to breed the same male to my remaining female from Chris Carmichael and the F1 female acquired by Bob Garby. The resulting clutches were 26 and 27 eggs. A total of 48 eggs hatched with one runt and the remaining hatchlings normally formed and with defensive attitudes. The clutch from my F1 female (name Fannie May) resulted in the first noted visible morph for the Sarawak population. Two “clouded, purple” appearing hatchlings were in the clutch along with several with notable tail markings unique to other clutches. Details on the development of these mutations are still pending at the time of this writing.

For those concerned with diversifying the Sarawak population, I provided some more detail about the lineage. From what I can piece together the lineage appears to be as follows:

Carmichael Imports

IMa-Import Male 1
IFa-Import Female 1

IMb-Import Male 2
IFb-Import Female 2

IMc-Import Male 3
IFc-Import Female 3

First Generation-1999

Garby

IMa x IFa –Garby Mf1a
IMa x IFa – Garby Ff1a

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IMb x IFb – Pokey Ff1b
IMc x IFc – Fannie May Ff1c

Subsequent Breedings

2003-2007
Garby Mf1a x Garby Ff1a
2005-2007
Garby Mf1 x Import IFc

2008
GarbyMf1 x Pokey Ff1b
2009
GarbyMf1 x Fannie May Ff1c

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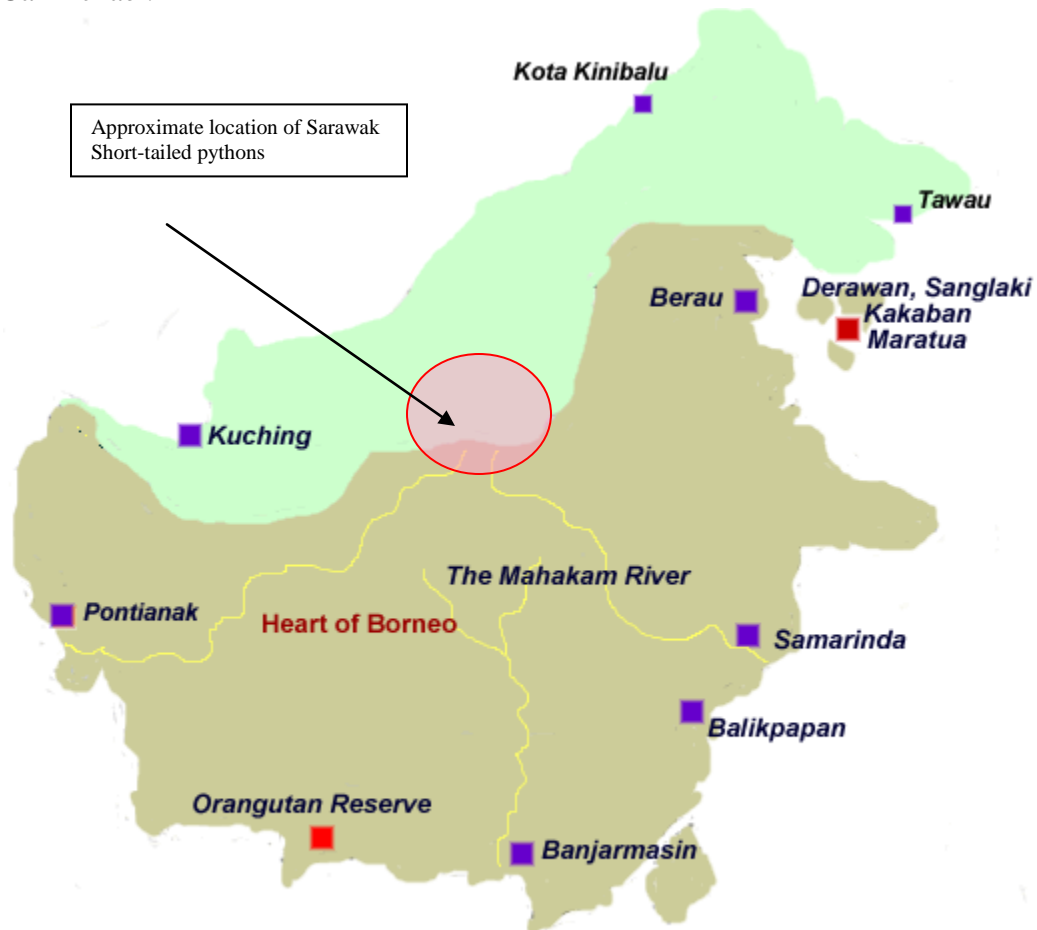
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The following is a basic map of the island of Borneo with the relative location of the Sarawak population extrapolated by the information provided by Dave Barker and Chris Carmichael.



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Appearances of Sarawak Pythons

Fades and Visible Het Fades – post hatchling



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What is the future of the Sarawak population in the US? This is hard to say at this point since the distribution is limited and few people have pairs of these pythons. To my knowledge there are very few confirmed pairs. I want to thank Dave Barker and Chris Carmichael for their efforts in attaining, establishing the original animals. I also want to thank them for providing the history on the Sarawak Pythons.

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