

EXTRA EXTRA!

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Let them eat snake, say scientists

This is an edited version of a story from
© The Times [14/3/2024]

Dr Daniel Natusch has eaten plenty of Burmese python over the years. “At the risk of repeating a cliché, it tastes a lot like chicken,” he says.

“You run the knife along the back of the snake and you almost get a 4m-long filleted steak. Firm white meat, no bones. And then it depends on how you prepare it. I’ve had it barbecued, in curries, as biltong and, yeah, it’s great.”

It is also, he believes, more sustainable than producing poultry, pigs or cattle.

In a study Natusch, who is based at Macquarie University in Sydney, looked at the growth rates of more than 4,000 reticulated and Burmese pythons at two large farms in Thailand and Vietnam, as well as how much the reptiles were given to eat.

In captivity, a well-fed baby python can double in size in a matter of weeks. By its first birthday, it can be 4m long.

In terms of converting the protein they consume into protein that humans can eat, the snakes easily beat every other livestock species studied so far, including cows, pigs and chickens but

also salmon and crickets.

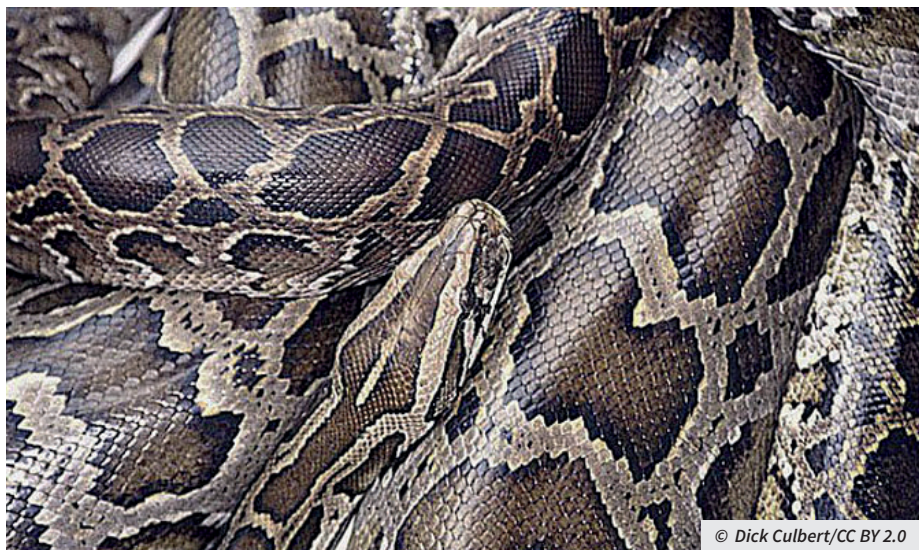
They are about nine times more efficient than poultry, and more than 30 times more efficient than cattle, meaning they require far less protein to produce an equivalent amount of flesh, while also producing less CO2 and methane, according to the study.

“This is an alternative livestock system that needs to be taken seriously,” Natusch said.

In livestock production, cold-blooded animals such as snakes, fish and insects require as much as 90% less energy than warm-blooded mammals, and snake meat is already growing in popularity in Asian countries, where it has traditionally been eaten.

However, the industry remains small and Natusch, who chairs the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s Snake Specialist Group, believes that it could make sense to introduce snake farming to new regions.

The study was published in the journal Scientific Reports.



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