Boa Constrictor

Natural History

**Common Name:** Boa Constrictor (see below)

**Scientific Name:** *Boa constrictor*

**Lifespan**
- Roughly 20 – 30 years (roughly half this time in the wild); captive record ~40 years

**Size**
- 6 – 8 ft for males; 7 – 10 ft for females, females are typically larger and heavier than males

**Distribution**
- Central America through the northern half of South America and associated islands. Introduced populations in southern Florida and St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands

**Habitat**
- Primarily tropical rainforest, some populations arid semidesert

**Habits**
- Frequently shelters in mammal burrows or in trees
- Harmless, temperament varies greatly from very docile to aggressive
- Primarily nocturnal
- Adults mostly terrestrial, but may spend time in water, juveniles more arboreal

**Diet**
- Rodents, lizards, birds, and birds’ eggs; subdues prey by constriction

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Captive Care

Housing

• 48” X 24” or equivalent area minimum for adults. Young snakes 10 or 20 gallon tank or equivalent area
• Secure, tight-fitting lid or door is necessary
• Substrate can be newspaper, cypress mulch, orchid bark, aspen shavings, reptile carpet, avoid cedar chips, gravel or sand!
• Sturdy water dish – water must be available at all times, enough area for soaking if possible
• Two hide boxes (warm side, cool side)

Temperature and Lighting

• Ambient cage temperature 75 F, with “hot area” of 85 to 95 F. Provide heat gradient
• “Hot area” can be achieved by using radiant heat, heat pad on outside of cage, or both
• Lighting not necessary, heat can be achieved by heat pads only
• However, lighting can be dome lamp with incandescent bulbs for heat as well - 12 hr cycle
• UVB lighting beneficial, but not necessary
• Thermometer (temp gun or probe) to measure actual temperature is a necessity
• Adjustable temperature heat pads, thermostat and/or rheostats for any heat source is beneficial

Diet

• Carnivore only, needs whole animal prey
• Frozen/thawed mice, rats, rabbits, chickens, whole prey cased links as alternative*
• Feed once a week especially for juveniles, twice or once a month of a larger prey size for adults is OK, and may even be preferred
• Avoid feeding live prey
• Supplemental vitamins and minerals generally not necessary

Special Notes

• Susceptible to snake mites – difficult to detect and eradicate in some boas
• Prone to infectious stomatitis (mouth rot, nose rub) due to rubbing snout on enclosure and/or lid
• Improper shedding and/or retained eye caps due to low/improper humidity is a common problem
• Widely bred in captivity; many different captive produced color morphs known; mostly we get wild type coloration coming in for adoption rather than morphs
• ~9 or 10 subspecies of boa constrictor recognized, other names include common boa, red-tailed boa, Colombian red-tailed boa, etc. not all are synonyms for the same type of snake

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