



*Caleb Carruth

African House Snakes (*Lamprophis sp.*) and (*Boaedon sp.*)

Hardy and Often Underrated

African house snakes are relatively small to medium sized, secretive colubrids consisting of about 7 species. African House snakes range throughout most of sub Saharan Africa. Commonly kept species include the Aurora House snake (*L. aurora*), Cape House snake (*B. capensis*), and Striped, or Lined House snake (*B. lineatus*). Depending on the species and locality, these snakes can be quite variable in color and pattern. Colors can range from brown, reddish brown, reddish orange, to blackish with lighter colored stripes and/or faint blotches. Eyes are large, and pupils typically elliptical. These snakes most often tend to be crepuscular, and primarily terrestrial, although they can also swim and climb well in search of small mammals and birds, as well as to seek refuge. Overall, African house snakes are a very hardy, easily kept, and underrated genus of snakes that can make for excellent pet snakes for the beginner to advanced keeper, breeder, or enthusiast alike.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Serpentes

Infraorder: Alethinophidia

Family: Colubridae

Subfamily: Lamprophiinae/Pseudoxyrhophiinae

Genus: Lamprophis and Boaedon

Species: *Lamprophis sp.** and *Boaedon sp.**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, African house snakes are hardy snakes that can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Consisting of about 7 species, African House snakes range throughout most of sub Saharan Africa, with their exact range depending to a large extent on the particular species and

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subspecies. African house snakes may be found in a variety of habitats ranging from arid to semi-arid deserts and scrublands, savannahs, grasslands, coastal regions, to human habitations (hence the name house snake), as well as tropical to sub-tropical forests and woodlands.

Conservation Status

Conservation status is dependent upon the species. Some are IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC), Endangered (EN), or Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner

Size

African house snakes range from 5 to 8 inches as hatchlings, and 2 to 5 feet, or 24 to 54 inches as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling African house snakes can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult house snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. African house snakes are primarily terrestrial, and floor space is more important than height. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding such as cage carpet or cage liner, fine aspen shavings, cypress mulch, or coconut fibers. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide additional basking and hiding opportunities using live or artificial foliage, rocks, logs, driftwood, or other hides. Also be sure to include a sturdy water bowl or dish as well.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized UTH (or tank heating pad), ceramic or radiant heat emitter, or incandescent, UVA/UVB, or other heat producing bulb. Ideal temperatures for African house snakes range from 75 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and 80 to 88 degrees F on the warm side. Most species of snakes have fairly simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. Also be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least once per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, African house snakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, African house snakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. In most circumstances, it is recommended to provide humanely pre-killed rodents acquired from a reputable source, as offering live rodents to any snake can carry risk of serious injury or even death to your snake when the rodent bites to defend itself or otherwise gnaws on your animal. A general rule of thumb when selecting feeder rodent sizes for your snake is to provide prey items that are approximately the same width as the snake's widest point. It should also be noted that many snakes may refuse food for longer periods of time over several weeks or months, especially in the fall and winter months or if several other husbandry conditions are not being met. While this can be alarming to new pet owners, it is oftentimes normal, but their overall

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health and weight should be monitored during these times to make sure they do not lose weight or otherwise deteriorate. Most snakes typically are fed whole prey items, and do not usually require additional calcium or vitamin D3 supplementation unless otherwise directed. Their feeding frequency will also depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

As with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile house snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. House snakes may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your house snake gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Many house snakes will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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