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## African Mole Snake (*Pseudaspis cana*)

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### Africa's Pituophis Species

The African mole snake is a species of large, robust bodied colubrid snake indigenous to a wide variety of habitats in southern Africa. As their name implies, they are primarily a terrestrial to heavily fossorial species that may construct their own burrows, or utilize burrows of other animals. African mole snakes are powerful and voracious constrictors, often utilizing constriction, or simply compressing their smaller prey against the walls of burrows in order to subdue them. The African mole snake is a large, heavy bodied colubrid snake with a relatively small, wedge shaped, sloping head and forehead, and pointed snout. This species can be quite variable in color, with juveniles undergoing an ontogenetic color and pattern change as adults from having darker dorsal and lateral blotches, markings, or spots. As adults, they can range in color from blackish, gray, light to dark brown, yellowish to yellowish-brown, tan, reddish, to pinkish. African mole snakes occasionally appear in the pet trade, and can be cared for in much of the same way as the North American Pituophis species (bullsnakes, pine snakes, and gopher snakes).

### 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:** Boodontinae

**Genus:** Pseudaspis

**Species:** *Pseudaspis cana*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### Lifespan and Longevity

African mole snakes can be expected to attain longevity of at least 15 to 25 years or more in captivity if provided for correctly.

### Distribution and Habitat

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The African mole snake ranges across much of southern Africa, including South Africa, to Angola in the north, and Kenya in the east. These snakes are strong burrowers, and may create their own burrows or utilize the burrows of other animals in a variety of habitats from arid to semi-arid desert and scrubland, savannahs, to grasslands and mountain regions within this range.

### **Conservation Status**

Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

African mole snakes range from 12 to 18 inches as hatchlings, and 4 to 7 feet, or 48 to 84 inches, as most adults.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling and juvenile African mole snakes can be housed in a 15 to 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult mole snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 40 to 55 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Mole 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 mole 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 mole 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 mole 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

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met. While this can be alarming to new pet owners, it is oftentimes normal, but their overall 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 mole snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. When threatened, this species may rattle their tails and hiss loudly in short audible bursts, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your mole snake gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. There is variability between temperaments of many individual, subspecies, and localities of these snakes. Some can become quite tame and tolerant of regular handling as they become older, while other specimens will remain irascible and will hiss, strike, or tail rattle at any provocation.

**\*\*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](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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