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Asian Vine Snakes *(Ahaetulla nasuta) (Ahaetulla prasina) And Related Species*

Sly, Green Tree Dwellers

The Asian green vine snakes, also occasionally known as the Asian “whip snakes”, are a species of medium sized, slender bodied arboreal colubrid snake indigenous to a wide range of southern to southeastern Asia in humid, tropical lowland forests, swamplands, and woodlands. This very slender bodied species can vary in color from bright green to bluish-green, tan, to light brown, often with paler irregular crossbanding. The head and snout is very elongated, projected, and leaf-like, and the eyes large with horizontal pupils. An opisthoglyphous, or “rear fanged” genus, the Asian vine snakes possess a pair of enlarged, grooved rear teeth on their upper jaw used in “chewing” to subdue and consume smaller prey. As their common names imply, Asian vine snakes are extremely cryptic in their coloration and appearance, often remaining motionless and even swaying to mimic the movements of twigs, vines, and other vegetation in wind. Vine snakes are also diurnal, arboreal ambush predators of smaller reptiles, amphibians, and other small animals, and have very large eyes and pupils, giving these species excellent depth perception and vision. Asian vine snakes remain to be a species widely kept or bred in captivity, but for the right enthusiast with the experience and skill set to maintain them, these very unique snakes can make for very intriguing species to keep and work with in captivity.

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: Colubrinae

Genus: Ahaetulla

Species: *Ahaetulla sp.**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

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Captive longevity for these species is not widely available. However, these species can be expected to attain captive longevity of at least 10 to 12 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Asian vine snakes are a highly arboreal genus of snakes indigenous to the humid, tropical lowland forests, woodlands, swamplands, and oftentimes near human habitations and agricultural areas of southern to southeastern Asia to Indo-China. These species may range throughout much of Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and West Malaysia.

Conservation Status

Conservation status is dependent upon the species. *A. prasina* is IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC). *A. nasuta* is Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Hatchling Asian vine snakes are tiny and very slender bodied, although information about their size is sparse. Adult Asian vine snakes can attain lengths of up to 6 feet, or 72 inches, although 3 to 5 feet (or 36 to 54 inches) is more typical for most species.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof, as well as well-ventilated. Typically, for an adult Asian vine snake, a minimum of a 55 to 75 gallon tall terrarium or enclosure will be needed. Substrates that promote bioactivity, and moderate to high humidity, including coconut husk fibers, peat moss, sphagnum moss, cypress mulch, or orchid bark should be used for these snakes. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide a sturdy water bowl or dish and a hide box at all times in the enclosure. Asian vine snakes also seldom recognize standing water, and will benefit greatly from regular misting for their hydration, either manually, or through the use of a misting or fogging system at least once to twice weekly. They will drink the condensation and moisture from their scales and surrounding areas of the enclosure more so than from a standing water bowl. Asian vine snakes are also highly arboreal, and should be given an ample variety of live or artificial plants, vines, driftwood, cork bark, arboreal hides, perches, rock or log hides, and other furnishings for sufficient hiding, basking, and climbing opportunities.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Create a vertical thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, nighttime red bulb, or radiant heat emitter. Asian vine snakes also benefit from the appropriate overhead incandescent and UVA/UVB full spectrum lighting. This UVA/UVB lighting is preferred for these snakes in order to allow for them to properly synthesize the needed calcium and vitamin D3. Overall, suitable temperatures for natal green snakes can range from 85 to 90 degrees on the warm side, and 75 to 80 degrees on the cooler side, and ambient temperatures. An arboreal hotspot of 95 to 100 degrees F should be provided. A 10 to 12 degree drop in temperatures overnight, as well as a 12 to 14 hour day/night cycle for these snakes is also recommended. Humidity should be maintained at 80 to 90 % and be monitored with a sufficient hygrometer and by misting. Overall, UV lighting, as well as adequate ventilation, climbing, and basking opportunities are the largest considerations to keep in mind when keeping this genus. 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

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those of one's animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; Asian vine snakes are active, diurnal, alert, and sight oriented snakes, feeding on a variety of smaller reptiles and amphibians including frogs, small lizards, and other prey items they can locate and consume such as insects, other invertebrates, and occasionally small or fledging or newborn birds and rodents.

In captivity, although undemanding, Asian vine snakes can be difficult feeders, often requiring time to adjust and acclimate before willingly eating. Any prey items that are given should be of appropriate size relative to the snake. These species have reportedly been quite affinitive for live feeder frogs and/or small feeder lizards such as anoles or house geckos, although any of these food items should be ensured to be parasite free whenever possible. Frozen-thawed, pre-killed or live rodents, such as pinky mice or rats may also occasionally be accepted. Various scenting techniques may be required to further coax these species to take rodents. These species are reported to have high metabolisms, requiring more frequent feeding intervals than many other snakes. Smaller, more frequent feedings of 3 to 5 days has seen success in maintaining these snakes. 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

Asian vine snakes tend to be a docile and inoffensive species, although their behaviors when threatened can include gaping, inflating their necks and throats, and inhaling or puffing themselves up to appear larger, although these species will rarely bite or strike in defense. However, frequent, rough, or prolonged handling should be avoided. Furthermore, members of this genus are rear fanged, or opisthoglyphous. Although envenomation is possible, little is currently known about the effects of this species' venom, and these species are not currently known to be medically significant or dangerous to humans, having a primitive and inefficient delivery system. Nonetheless, these species should be handled and maintained with at least some caution.

****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

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility.

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