



*Rebecca Wyman/RAW Reptiles

“Boa Constrictors” (*Boa constrictor*/*Boa imperator*) and Other “Boa Constrictor” Species

Mid-Sized and Often Locality Specific

“Boa constrictors”, commonly and collectively speaking, are generally medium sized to large, terrestrial to semi-arboreal species of boas widely distributed in Central and South America. They can be quite variable in coloration, appearance, and size depending on any of the twelve or more species, subspecies, and localities within their wide range. Depending on these factors, these snakes are heavy bodied tan, light to dark brown, yellowish, to cream colored snakes with dark brown to reddish brown “bow tie” shaped dorsal and lateral blotches, a dark ocular stripe running behind each of the eyes, and red to reddish orange or brownish blotches towards the tail. “Boa constrictors” as a species are habitat generalists, and can be found in many different environments from semi-arboreal to terrestrial environments, although adults of most species become larger and heavier bodied. In the pet trade, many specimens are known as “red tailed” boas; however, the majority of these are actually the common boas *Boa imperator* (BI), and not true “red tails”, *Boa constrictor* (BC). “Boa constrictors” are a staple “large snake” species in the pet trade, and can make for excellent and docile pets with the right level of knowledge, experience, and foresight without reaching overly large and unmanageable sizes that some other species do. Many different color and pattern morphs are also widely available including many different strains of albinos, hypomelanistics, snows, anerytheristics, ghost boas, jungle boas, leopard boas, motleys, sunglows, and many others.

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: Boidae

Subfamily: Boinae

Genus: Boa

Species: *Boa constrictor** and *Boa imperator**. Also see additional previously mentioned species below.

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**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, “Boa constrictors” can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more, although up to 35 to 40 years is also not uncommon.

Other Species of Boa Constrictors

In addition to the most commonly seen and kept *Boa imperator* and *Boa constrictor* species in herpetoculture and the pet trade, there are also several other species and/or subspecies of “Boa constrictors” found across Central and South America. These other species can vary considerably in their size, color, pattern, range and distribution, and habitat, but for the most part, have similar care and husbandry requirements as the nominate species. There may be slight differences in temperature, humidity, diet, and/or other husbandry factors at least worth mentioning, however. Some of the other species of “Boa constrictors” for which this care and information sheet can also apply to include the **Amaral’s Boa (*Boa amarali*)**, **Equadorian Boa (*Boa melanogaster*)**, **Argentine Boa (*Boa occidentalis*)**, **Hog Island Boa (also *Boa imperator*)**, **Long Tailed Boa (*Boa longicauda*)**, and **Pearl Island Boa (*Boa sabogae*)**.

Distribution and Habitat

“Boa constrictors” are a widespread snake, ranging from Mexico, through Central America, and into South America (Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Guyana). Depending on the subspecies and locality, “Boa constrictors” can range from arid and semi-arid desert and scrubland, to grasslands, savannahs, tropical to sub-tropical forests, woodlands, swamplands, agricultural areas, and near human habitations.

Conservation Status

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

Legal and Regulatory Status(*Subject to Change)

Boa constrictor occidentalis is CITES Appendix I as of October 2017. Boidae spp. are CITES Appendix II (Except the species included in Appendix I) as of October 2017. Also consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

“Boa constrictors” range from 12 to 18 inches as neonates. Boas are sexually dimorphic, with males averaging 5 to 8 feet, or 54 to 96 inches, and females averaging 7 to 9 feet, or 84 to 108 inches. Some species, subspecies, and localities can reach larger sizes than others, and may reach up to 12 to 13 feet, or 144 to 156 inches. **Always be sure to consider the potential adult size and long term commitment of keeping and housing a “Boa constrictor” or any other large snake prior to obtaining one as part of being a responsible reptile or other pet owner!**

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Neonate to juvenile boas can be started out in a 20 gallon long terrarium or similar sized enclosure, but will soon require larger accommodations. If glass enclosures are used at any point, be sure that the enclosure retains sufficient humidity. Many of the commercially made plastic or fiberglass enclosures, or otherwise custom-designed enclosures that can retain heat and humidity well are perhaps the best

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and most practical enclosures to use to house mid to large sized boas and pythons. Depending on the age and size of the animal, a four to six foot by two foot enclosure or larger is required. Boas can be maintained on a substrate of cage liner material, cypress mulch, sphagnum moss, or sphagnum fir mixtures, but always ensure that the substrate does not become too damp or moist. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Boas will also require a large sturdy water dish or tub that must be cleaned, sanitized, and changed regularly, especially if dirtied. Providing an adequately sized hidebox, artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, logs, and other cage furnishings can also provide additional hiding and basking opportunities. Boas will climb if given the opportunity, but floor space is more important than height.

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 “Boa constrictors” range from 75 to 82 degrees F on the cool side and 85 to 92 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, “Boa constrictors” are carnivorous, and will prey upon a wide range of small to large mammals, birds, and other reptiles that they can ambush and consume. In captivity, “Boa constrictors” can be given feeder rodents or rabbits of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Larger feeder or prey items for exceptionally large boas can include prey items such as large rabbits, and even poultry, pigs, and other pre-killed livestock, which can also often be obtained through alternative means through local wholesalers, meat, or agricultural suppliers in one’s area. In most general circumstances, it is recommended to provide humanely pre-killed prey animals acquired from a reputable source, as offering live animals to any snake can carry risk of serious injury or even death to your snake when the prey item bites to defend itself or otherwise gnaws on your animal. A general rule of thumb when selecting feeder prey item 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 these things can be alarming, 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, young and juvenile boas are often initially more nervous and defensive. Young boas may gape and hiss, and attempt to bite what they perceive to be a threat or a predator. Handle your boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most

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boas are docile and will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older. Larger boas do require some careful handling though; Do not place or allow a larger snake around the neck when handling a “Boa constrictor”.

****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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