Calabar Burrowing Boa/Python *(Charina/Calabaria reinhardtii)*

An Old World Boa with Two "Heads"

Calabar boas are an unusual old world species that may also be known as Calabar ground boas, Calabar boas, Calabar pythons, Calabaria, Calabar ground Pythons, African burrowing boas/pythons, or other combinations of these names thereof. Originally classified as a sand boa species under the genus Eryx, and then as a member of the family Pythonidae, the Calabar boa has been under taxonomic dispute and rearrangement over the centuries, but the genus is now considered an ancient clade, or branch of Boidae snakes with no close living relatives. Calabar boas are a fairly small, uniformly thick, cylindrical bodied boa with a very blunt head and tail, and enlarged shield like scales atop the head. Ground color ranges from blackish, brown, or dark reddish-brown with lighter reddish, yellowish, and/or grayish speckling. One or more lighter bands or rings are also present near the tail. These docile and inoffensive snakes employ unique defensive behaviors when threatened, which can include elevating their blunt tails to serve as a decoy to predators, and/or by coiling themselves into a tight ball with their head in the center or otherwise inaccessible. Calabar boas are among the few species of oviparous boas, laying 1 to 6 large eggs following ovulation.

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: Calabariinae
Genus: Charina/Calabaria
Species: *Charina/Calabaria reinhardtii**
**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Calabar boas can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more, although up to 30 to 40 years is not uncommon.

Distribution and Habitat
Calabar boas are a relatively ancient species of nocturnal to crepuscular, fossorial boa indigenous to the equatorial rainforests of western and central Africa, including Cameroon, Central African Republic, and the Dominican Republic of Congo.

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

Legal and Regulatory Status(*Subject to Change)
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
Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size
Calabar boas range from 5 to 8 inches as neonates, and 1 ½ to 3 ½ feet, or 18 to 42 inches as adults. They very seldom, if ever, exceed this size range.

Housing and Enclosure
Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Neonate Calabar boas can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult Calabar boas should be housed in a minimum of a 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Calabar boas are primarily terrestrial, and floor space is more important than height. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding such as fine aspen shavings, orchid bark, non-toxic potting soil, or cypress mulch. 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 Calabar boas 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, Calabar boas are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, amphibians, smaller reptiles, and other smaller vertebrates. In captivity, Calabar boas can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Newborn, juvenile, and some adult calabar boas may require scenting with frogs or lizards, however. In most general 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 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 previously mentioned, Calabar boas are quite placid and innocuous snakes, and reluctant to bite under most circumstances. Handle your Calabar boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Neonates and wild caught boas may be shy and be included to curl into a ball in self-defense, but in general, captive bred and born Calabar boas 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

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. MAHS cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirely, including any and all MAHS logos and disclaimers.