



*Jane Fry

Royal Diadem Ratsnakes (*Spalerosophis diadema*)

Variable Colored and Vocal

Diadem ratsnakes inhabit and tolerate relatively hot, arid deserts and savannah regions within their range. Although they are commonly referred to as ratsnakes by their common names, these snakes are actually more closely related to the whipsnakes and racers. The Diadem rat snakes of the genus *Spalerosophis* have long been in a state of taxonomic disarray, with at least 8 subspecies formerly known, many of which have recently been elevated to full species status and are only occasionally seen, kept, and produced in herpetoculture. The Diadem rat snakes can be quite variable in coloration and appearance, but juveniles usually have a tan, light brown, grayish, to yellowish ground color with dark, alternating brown to reddish brown dorsal blotches with a distinct, dark post ocular stripe on each side of the head connected by a dark band across the brow. Adults of most species can vary considerably in color ranging from tan, light brown, pale yellowish, grayish, salmon pinkish, to blackish with variable amounts of darker pigmentation scattered across the scales. The head and neck are fairly wide and distinct, and is often a muddied reddish-orange with darker mottling. As with the racers and whipsnakes, the tail is long and slender.

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

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Family: Colubridae

Subfamily: Colubrinae

Genus: Spalerosophis

Species: *Spalerosophis diadema**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, diadem ratsnakes can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The diadem rat snakes, also occasionally known as the Egyptian rat snakes, are a group of moderately built, medium to large colubrid snakes indigenous to and fairly widespread over much of northern Africa, Middle East, and into India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and other areas of southern to southeast Asia.

Conservation Status

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

Legal and Regulatory Status(*Subject to Change)

Consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Royal diadem ratsnakes are approximately 6 to 12 inches as hatchlings, and 3 to 5 feet, or 36 to 54 inches as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling diadem snakes can be housed in a 10 to 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult diadem snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Diadem snakes are semi-arboreal, but 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 diadem 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, diadem snakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird eggs, smaller amphibians and reptiles, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, diadem snakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice, although some may initially require scenting with lizards or frogs. 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 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:

Despite their relatively basic care requirements, Diadem rat snakes are species that are often defensive and quite volatile in response to handling, particularly juveniles. When disturbed, these snakes may rapidly vibrate the tips of their tails, assume a defensive strike posture and bite, and/or hiss loudly while puffing their bodies to appear larger and more intimidating. In many ways, their defensive behavior resembles that of Pituophis species (the bull, pine, and gopher snakes of North America). Specimens can become more traceable and easily handled, but in general, are snakes that require frequent and consistent handling from a young age to reach such a point. In conclusion, the Diadem rat snakes remain fairly uncommon in herpetoculture and the pet industry, but are nevertheless unique and interesting colubrids. Despite their typically irascible disposition in response to handling, these species have nonetheless found a small following of keepers and herpetoculturists who are dedicated to keeping and propagating these species in captivity for the intermediate to experienced reptile enthusiast seeking an alert and interesting species of colubrid snake not commonly seen.

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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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