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Haitian and Dominican Mountain Boas (*Epicrates striatus*)

Brick Red Natives of Dominica

The Dominican boas are a medium sized, slender to moderate bodied species of boa. Eight (8) subspecies are currently recognized, although the Dominican red mountain boa (*Epicrates striatus striatus*) is perhaps the most colorful and widely coveted and sought after. Other subspecies endemic to specific islands or island chains include *E. s. exagisticus*, *E. s. fosteri*, *E. s. mccraniei*, *E. s. fowleri*, *E. s. strigilatus*, and *E. s. warreni*. Other common names for these species of boas can include the Hispaniola boa, Haitian boa, Dominican boa, Dominican mountain boa, and Dominican red mountain boa. The Haitian boa (*E. striatus ailurus*) is also occasionally offered in herpetoculture. Ground color can be quite variable among the subspecies and localities, ranging from light brown or tan, to yellowish, yellowish-brown, grayish or silver, to deep red or reddish orange. Darker brown to reddish brown irregular dorsal blotches and/or patterning is also usually present on most subspecies. A crepuscular species, Dominican boas are also strong climbers, and will frequently ambush bats, small birds, and rodents from the entrances of caves, nests, or other roosts, where they use their heat sensitive labial pits and receptors to locate prey even in complete darkness. Dominican boas are an uncommon and intriguing medium sized boa species in the herpetocultural hobby and industry that are sure to not disappoint!

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: *Epicrates*

Species: *Epicrates striatus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

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If provided the proper care, Dominican boas can be expected to attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more, although up to 35 to 40 years is possible.

Distribution and Habitat

Dominican mountain boas are endemic to the tropical mountain forests and woodlands of the Bahamas, Bimini Islands, Dominican Republic, and Hispaniola.

Conservation Status

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

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Dominican boas range from 12 to 16 inches as neonates, and typically 5 to 7 feet, or 54 to 84 inches as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Neonate to juvenile Dominican 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 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.

Dominican 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. Dominican 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. Dominican 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 Dominican 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, Dominican boas are carnivorous, and will prey upon a wide range of

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small mammals, birds, and other reptiles that they can ambush and consume. In captivity, Dominican boas can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. 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 Dominican boas can initially be nervous and defensive. They may be more prone to act defensively by coiling and striking if they feel threatened or defensive. Handle your Dominican boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most adult boas will become docile and more tolerant or accustomed to handling as they become older, although this species can still be known for its persistent musking when handled.

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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