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Glossy Snakes (*Arizona elegans*)

Faded and Underrated

Also known as faded snakes, glossy snakes are a relatively small to medium sized colubrid snake species consisting of approximately nine subspecies found across the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. They earn their name of faded snake due to their often washed out color and/or pattern consisting of a tan, light brown, to cream colored ground color, and three rows of darker brown to reddish brown alternating dorsal and lateral blotches. This species also earns their more commonly used name of “glossy” snake due to their smooth scales and glossy appearances. Bearing resemblance to small Pituophis species (such as bullsnakes and gopher snakes), glossy snakes are secretive, and primarily nocturnal or crepuscular species that can be identified by their narrower, more pointed heads, and narrow dark post ocular bands. Glossy snakes have largely been an underrated species to maintain in herpetoculture and the pet industry, partially due to their initial preference for lizards and amphibians, but several captive bred color morphs have now been produced in recent years.

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: Arizona

Species: *Arizona elegans**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, glossy snakes can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat

Glossy snakes are indigenous to the southwestern United States and northern Mexico, where they may be found in semi-arid deserts, scrubland, and grasslands.

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Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Glossy snakes range from about 5 to 10 inches as hatchlings, and 2 to 5 feet, or 24 to 54 inches as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

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

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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

Glossy snakes are generally a mild mannered species, and seldom behave or are overly defensive. As with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile glossy snakes can initially be nervous and defensive. Glossy snakes may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your glossy snake gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most glossy snakes will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older and are mild mannered snakes.

****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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