



Gray Banded Kingsnake *Lampropeltis alterna*

Variable Kingsnake *Lampropeltis thayeri*

- Gray banded kingsnakes are indigenous to the Trans Pecos and Chihuahuan deserts of southwestern United States. The Variable Kingsnake occurs in the eastern mountain ranges of Mexico.
- These kingsnakes are fairly secretive and nocturnal. Several different phases and localities occur, ranging in ground color of gray or bluish gray with wide reddish orange bands edged in black. The thayeri kingsnake is much more variable in color and pattern, with multiple phases.
- If provided the proper care, these king snakes can attain longevity of 15-20 years or more.

Size

Ranges from 5-10 inches as hatchlings, and 3-4 feet (36-48 inches) for most adults.

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling king snakes can be housed in a 10-15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult king snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20-30 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. King snakes will thrive on a substrate of newspaper, cage liner material, aspen or Sani Chip shavings, or cypress mulch. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide a water bowl or dish and a hide box at all times in the enclosure. Artificial foliage, driftwood, and other cage furnishings can provide additional security.

Create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter. Overhead, incandescent lighting can also be used, but is not required for king snakes (which are primarily nocturnal). Ideal temperatures for king snakes range from 75-80 degrees F on the cool side and 84-88 degrees F on the warm side.

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 2-3 months.

Feeding/Diet

In the wild, king snakes will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds and bird eggs and occasionally other snakes. Hatchlings and juveniles will occasionally feed on frogs or small lizards.

Most hatchlings can be started off on pinkie mice every 3-5 days. Both of these species may initially prefer frogs, lizards, or scented food items. Food items can gradually be increased as needed. Most adult king snakes can be fed adult mice to small adult rats once every 5-7 days. A general rule of thumb to follow when feeding snakes is to provide prey items that are approximately the same width as the widest point of the snake.

Handling

As with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile king snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. King snakes may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your king snake gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. The gray banded and thayeri kingsnakes overall tend to be inoffensive snakes with regular handling.

****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****