



## North American Green Rat Snake (*Senticolis triaspis*)

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### **Lesser Known Green Beauties**

The North American green ratsnake is oftentimes a lesser known species of medium sized to fairly large colubrid snake indigenous to the Madrean Evergreen forests and woodlands, as well as rocky grasslands and savannahs of the extreme southwestern United States and northern to northwestern Mexico. A secretive, diurnal to crepuscular species, the green ratsnake is also a powerful constrictor which forages for small mammals, birds, and reptiles among branches of low trees and shrubs, as well as terrestrially on the ground. Within its range and preferred habitats, this species often occurs in and around rock outcroppings, rock piles, and rock slabs. Coloration of adult specimens can range from a plain green, yellowish-green, to olive or olive-yellow with a pale cream to yellow colored ventral, or underside. Unlike the adults, hatchling and juvenile green ratsnakes are much more vividly patterned on a grayish to greenish-gray ground color and darker grayish brown dorsal and lateral blotches. Other identifying features of this species are their relatively long, narrow heads, and rounded pupils. The green ratsnake is an uncommonly kept species of snake, but for the more intermediate enthusiast that can locate one of these highly underrated species, can make for very rewarding and less commonly kept captives that are in need of further captive keeping and propagation.

### **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:** *Senticolis*

**Species:** *Senticolis triaspis*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, Green ratsnakes have the potential to attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

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### **Distribution and Habitat**

The North American green ratsnake occupies the arid to semi-arid Madrean Evergreen woodland and open forest communities, as well as semi-desert grassland, savannah, and scrublands of extreme southwestern United States and northern to northwestern Mexico. This species also often prefers rocky slopes and rock piles within its range and environments as well.

### **Conservation Status**

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

North American green ratsnakes can range from about 5 to 12 inches as hatchlings, and about 3 to 6 feet on average as adults, or 36 to 72 inches or slightly larger.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling green ratsnakes can be housed in a 10 to 20 gallon long or tall terrarium or enclosure. Adult green ratsnakes should be housed in a minimum of a 40 gallon tall or long terrarium or enclosure. North American green ratsnakes are semi-arboreal, and height can be just as important as floor space for this species. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding and that retains humidity well such as cypress mulch, orchid bark, 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, branches, driftwood, perches, or other hides. Also be sure to include a sturdy water bowl or dish as well. Additional humid hides can be provided as well for additional humidity.

### **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 North American green ratsnakes 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, North American green ratsnakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, North American green ratsnakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. 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

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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 with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile rat snakes of most species may initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle them gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Many snakes will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older. Green ratsnakes are overall a relatively mild mannered species to handle.

**\*\*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](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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