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## Jamaican Boa (*Epicrates/Chilabothrus subflavus*)

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### **Jealousy Inducing Jamaicans!**

The Jamaican boa is a medium sized, slender to moderate bodied species of boa. Similar species also in the *Epicrates* or *Chilabothrus* genus include common names for other species of boas such as the Hispaniola boa, Haitian boa, Dominican boa, Dominican mountain boa, and Dominican red mountain boa. Ground color in this species ranges from a yellowish, golden, to greenish-yellow or gold with dirty, irregular darker banding, crossbarring, and/or blotching on the anterior two thirds of the body, grading into a darker black to dark green or olive towards the tail and posterior third of the body. The head is mostly unmarked, and a narrow post-ocular stripe is present on each side of the head. A crepuscular species, Jamaican 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. They are also among the largest species of snakes endemic to the West Indies. Jamaican 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/Chilabothrus*

**Species:** *Epicrates/Chilabothrus subflavus*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

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

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### **Distribution and Habitat**

Jamaican boas are endemic to the rocky, tropical mountain forests and woodlands of Jamaica, as well as surrounding islands, thereof.

### **Conservation Status**

IUCN Red List Vulnerable (VU).

### **Legal and Regulatory Status(\*Subject to Change)**

*Epicrates subflavus* is CITES Appendix I as of October 2017 and Endangered Species Act of 1974 listed species. Also consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Jamaican boas are large as neonates, and can reach up to 15 to 24 inches, or around 1 ½ to 2 feet, and typically 6 to 7 feet, or 72 to 84 inches as adults.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

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

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**Carnivorous;** In the wild, Jamaican boas are carnivorous, and will prey upon a wide range of small mammals, birds, and other reptiles that they can ambush and consume. In captivity, Jamaican boas can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Neonates and juveniles may initially prefer feeder lizards or other scented prey items. 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 Jamaican 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 Jamaican boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Jamaican boas are a species that has held a negative reputation for being defensive and quick to strike, although their temperaments and dispositions can depend upon the individual animal. Some can become relatively docile with time and will tolerate handling, although others can remain prone to musking and/or striking. This is a species that requires previous knowledge and experience with mid-sized, and sometimes semi-defensive to defensive boids.

**\*\*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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