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Mandarin Rat Snake (*Elaphe/Euprepiophis mandarinus*)

Mandarin Beauties

The Mandarin ratsnake is a relatively small to medium sized old world rat snake species. They are a fairly slender bodied species, with a ground color of grayish to tan, light brown, or pinkish with a series of boldly colored black and yellow dorsal bands, triangular markings, or diamonds on the dorsum. The head is typically black or dark colored with a series of brighter yellow or white crosses and markings present. This species is indigenous to the cooler climates within their range, and are oftentimes a shy, crepuscular, and secretive species, preferring to burrow or remain hidden or unseen.

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: *Elaphe/Euprepiophis*

Species: *Elaphe/Euprepiophis mandarinus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, mandarin ratsnakes can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Mandarin ratsnakes are indigenous to the rocky fields, forests, and agricultural areas of southern to southeastern Asia, including China, Taiwan, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Experience Level Required

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Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Mandarin ratsnakes range from 5 to 12 inches as hatchlings, and 3 to 4 ½ feet, or 36 to 54 inches as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling mandarin rat snakes can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult mandarin rat snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 30 gallon long terrarium or enclosure or similar sized enclosure. These secretive rat snakes will do best on a substrate that enables them to burrow and hide, and can include fine aspen shavings, coconut fibers, sphagnum fir mixtures, or cypress mulch. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide a fresh water bowl or dish and a hide box at all times in the enclosure. Artificial foliage, driftwood, and other cage furnishings can provide additional hiding and basking opportunities. Maintain mandarin rat snakes at moderate humidity levels as well. Too much or too little ventilation or inadequate humidity can lead to respiratory infections, blisters, and/or other health related issues in this species. For maintaining adequate humidity, a humid hide box can be provided lined with a substrate that retains humidity well, such as sphagnum moss. Mandarin rat snakes will climb if given the opportunity, but are mainly terrestrial, and 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 under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter. Mandarin rat snakes are endemic to cooler climates, and husbandry should reflect this. Ideal temperatures for mandarin snakes can range from a gradient of 60 to 80 degrees F, with temperatures not to exceed 85 degrees F for prolonged periods of time. Mandarin rat snakes will typically do well at simply room temperature of 70 to 75 degrees F. UVA/UVB lighting, although not required for most snakes, can greatly benefit their overall health and well-being. 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, mandarin 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, mandarin 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 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

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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

Mandarin rat snakes are generally a shy and reclusive species. As with many snakes, hatchling and juveniles especially may oftentimes initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Adults can often become calmer and less prone to biting, but still can be somewhat nervous and flighty snakes to handle. Handle these snakes of any age or size gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal.

****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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