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Mountain Kingsnakes (*Lampropeltis zonata* ssp.) and (*Lampropeltis pyromelana* ssp.)

Pioneers of Herpetoculture

Mountain kingsnakes are a collective group of two small to medium sized kingsnake species consisting of approximately 10 subspecies. Most of the Arizona and California Mountain kingsnake species are tri colored species, with numerous red, black and yellowish to white bands present throughout the body. Some subspecies or specimens may become darker or have greater amounts of dark melanin as they become older, and most species also have a dark patch atop their heads and a lighter band around their napes (or necks). Kingsnakes derive their common names from their well-known habit of consuming other snake species, including indigenous venomous snakes. Early captive keeping and breeding of the mountain kingsnake species has pioneered much of the further developments being seen in pet keeping and herpetoculture.

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: *Lampropeltis*

Species: *Lampropeltis zonata** and *Lampropeltis pyromelana**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, mountain king snakes can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Species

The California Mountain Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis zonata*) consists of seven (7) subspecies including: Todos Santos Island Kingsnake (*L. z. herrerae*), San Pedro Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z. agalma*), Saint Helena Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z. zonata*), Coastal Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z. multifasciata*), Sierra Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z. multicineta*), San Diego Mountain Kingsnake

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(*L. z. pulchra*), and San Bernardino Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z. parvirubra*).

The Arizona Mountain Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis pyromelana*) consists of about three (3) subspecies including the Utah Mountain Kingsnake (*L. p. infralabialis*), Sonoran Mountain Kingsnake (*L. p. knoblochi*), and nominate subspecies, the Arizona Mountain Kingsnake (*L. p. pyromelana*).

Distribution and Habitat

The Mountain kingsnakes consist of a group of two kingsnake species and ten (10) subspecies collectively generally found in the western and southwestern United States and northern Mexico among the higher mountainous regions, as their common names imply.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Mountain kingsnakes range from about 5 to 8 inches as hatchlings, and 2 to 4 ½ feet, or 24 to 54 inches as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling mountain kingsnakes can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult mountain kingsnakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Mountain kingsnakes 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 mountain kingsnakes 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, mountain kingsnakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird's eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. Mountain kingsnakes also sometimes known for overpowering and consuming other snakes species that share their ranges, including venomous species. In captivity, mountain kingsnakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. In most circumstances, it is recommended to

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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 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 king snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. They 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. Most adult mountain kingsnakes are docile in temperament and can be readily tamed and handled with regular handling and interaction.

****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

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