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## Mussuranas (*Boiruna* spp.)

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### Voracious Latin American Natives

Mussuranas are a genus of opisthoglyphous colubrid snakes found in Central and South America, which consist of approximately five to six species. Although some species are now considered extinct, the most common, widely ranging and frequently kept and seen species of mussurana, *B. maculata*, is occasionally available in the herpetocultural hobby, and can make for unique and intriguing snakes to maintain. Mussuranas are primarily crepuscular to nocturnal predators well known for killing and consuming other snakes, although other prey items are also taken by these powerful and muscular snakes, which use a combination of constriction and their mild venom to subdue and consume their prey. Mussuranas can be quite variable in color depending on the age and individual, although most are generally uniformly colored and patterned snakes. Juveniles may be pinkish to reddish in color with a wide, paler whitish-yellow ring on the nape, and a darker head. As adults, these snakes may be a solid, uniform blackish, bluish-black, brownish black, to reddish brown with a darker head and labial (lip) scales. Their eyes are also fairly small. Although these snakes do possess rear fangs, and a mild venom, they are typically not medically significant to humans, and are, for the most part, unaggressive species which can make for unique and enjoyable species to maintain for the more intermediate to advanced enthusiast.

### 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:** Xenodontinae

**Genus:** *Boiruna*

**Species:** *Boiruna* spp.\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, mussuranas are hardy snakes that have the potential to attain

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longevity of at least 15 to 25 years or more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

Consisting of about 6 to 7 species, Mussuranas range through much of Central and South America to Guatemala and Brazil, as well as the Caribbean depending on the species. The most common and widespread species occurs in a wide variety of habitats and environments from dry savannah or scrubland to semi-desert regions, to more wet, humid, and moist forests, woodlands, or tropical rainforests, as well as agricultural and residential areas within these ranges.

### **Conservation Status**

Conservation status is dependent upon the species. Some are IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC), Extinct (EX), or Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

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

Consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

### **Size**

Mussuranas can range in size from 8 to 15 inches as hatchlings, and 4 to 5 ½ feet, or 48 to 66 on average inches as adults. Some individuals or specimens can reach up to nearly 8 feet in length (96 inches).

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling and juvenile mussuranas can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult mussuranas should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Mussuranas 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. A humid hide lined with sphagnum moss or similar substrates to retain humidity will also benefit these species.

### **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 Mussuranas 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**

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**Carnivorous;** In the wild, mussaranas are carnivorous, and are ophiophagus, or other snake eating species which will prey upon a variety of other indigenous snakes, including venomous pit viper species, which they capture and subdue using constriction and their mild venom. Other prey items are also eaten by these species, including amphibians, lizards and other smaller reptiles, and rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. In captivity, hatchling and juvenile mussaranas can initially be choosy eaters, preferring lizards, amphibians, smaller snakes, or other scented prey items, but often can be converted to unscented feeder rodents of appropriate size as they become older, such as rats or mice. These species will also fare better with being given smaller, more frequent prey items. 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 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 mussaranas may initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your house snake gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. As with many snakes, mussaranas will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older. Although these species are typically docile and inoffensive, seldom biting or reacting defensively, it should also be considered that these species are rear fanged, and possess a mild venom designed for subduing prey. They are more prone to bite during feeding, however, and although bites from these species typically only result in mild, localized swelling and bruising, mussaranas are species that should therefore be handled with some level of caution.

**\*\*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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