



North American Rat Snakes *Genus Pantherophis* *obsoletus/spiloides/alleghaniensis/bairdii* (Baird's Ratsnake)

- Ranges from southern Canada, much of the United States, and northern Mexico depending on species. Typically arboreal to semi arboreal.
- Extremely variable in color and pattern. Western, midland and some eastern races are black or blackish brown with absent or obscured patterning, while others have much more visible traces of dark blotches on a gray, yellowish, tan, orangish, or brown base color. Some eastern races or intergrades thereof may have 2 or more dark longitudinal stripes or blotches. The Baird's ratsnake is a salmon pinkish brown to orange-yellow with four longitudinal stripes similar to some eastern species.
- Many color and pattern "morphs" exist including albinos, brindle, white sided, leucistic, and hypomelanistic.
- If provided the proper care, rat snakes can attain longevity of 15-20 years or more.

Size

Ranges from 5-10 inches as hatchlings, and 3-6 feet (36-72 inches) for most adults.

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling rat snakes can be housed in a 10-15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult rat snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 40-50 gallon long terrarium or enclosure or larger. Rat snakes will thrive on a substrate of newspaper, cage liner material, aspen or Sani Chip shavings, or cypress mulch. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide a water bowl or dish and a hide box at all times in the enclosure. Artificial foliage, driftwood, and other cage furnishings can provide additional security.

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. Overhead, incandescent lighting can also be used, but is not required for rat snakes (which are primarily nocturnal). Ideal temperatures for rat snakes range from 75-80 degrees F on the cool side and 84-88 degrees F on the warm side.

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 2-3 months.

Feeding/Diet

In the wild, rat snakes will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, and small birds and bird eggs. Hatchlings and juveniles will occasionally feed on frogs or small lizards.

Most hatchlings can be started off on pinkie to fuzzy mice every 3-5 days. Food items can gradually be increased as needed. Most adult rat snakes can be fed adult mice to small rats once every 5-7 days. A general rule of thumb to follow when feeding snakes is to provide prey items that are approximately the same width as the widest point of the snake.

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. There is some variability in temperaments among the North American rat snakes. Many snakes will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older. Some species and even

individuals however have a reputation for remaining somewhat aggressive or irascible snakes. The Baird's ratsnake tends to be a mild mannered and easily handled species.

****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****