



Oriental, or Indo-Chinese Ratsnakes (*Ptyas* spp.)

Large, Old World Ratsnakes with Big Personalities

Also occasionally known as the “Korros”, Greater Keeled Ratsnakes, Chinese, or “Indo-Chinese” ratsnakes, or even colloquially just the “ratsnakes”, these snakes consist of approximately eight species of large, active, semi-arboreal to semi-terrestrial, Old World colubrid snakes indigenous to and widely distributed over southern to southeastern Asia. Although eight species are currently known and recognized, the “King Indo-Chinese Ratsnake” (*Ptyas carinata*), Chinese Ratsnake (*Ptyas korros*), and Oriental Ratsnake (*Ptyas mucosa*) are perhaps the most frequently kept and imported species in the pet trade. These large, active snakes can be quite variable in coloration and patterning depending upon the species, but may range from brown or brownish dorsally, to olive, blackish or bluish-black, or yellowish to yellowish-brown, often with contrasting dark to light cross-banding towards their tails to posterior two thirds of their bodies while other species’ scalation can be edged in black, giving them a braided appearance. Some species can also be bi-colored from the anterior to posterior portions of their bodies as well. Juveniles to young snakes may be more brightly and vibrantly colored and patterned than adults, and these species of snakes also typically have obtuse snouts and large eyes. Sometimes being the second largest species of snakes within their range after Asiatic species of pythons, these large, active diurnal to crepuscular species are important and beneficial predators of smaller mammals, birds, and other reptiles and amphibians. While these species may not be the most frequently kept and imported group of snakes in general, they can, for the more intermediate to experienced enthusiast, make for extremely rewarding and unique captives for anyone looking for a large, intelligent, and perceptive colubrid to set them apart from the rest.

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: *Ptyas*

Species: *Ptyas* spp.*

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

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Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the correct care and husbandry, these species of ratsnakes can achieve longevity of up to 15 to 25 years or slightly more.

Distribution and Habitat

The Oriental, or Indo-Chinese ratsnakes are a genus of large, arboreal to semi-arboreal Old World ratesnakes which generally range across southern and southeastern Asia, from Indonesia, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Thailand, to the Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Singapore depending on the species and subspecies. Species can also be found from India, Sri Lanka, through Bangladesh, Laos, Taiwan, and West Malaysia through to many locales in China, as well as Iran and Nepal. These large, active ratsnakes may be found in a variety of habitats depending on the species or subspecies, from tropical to sub-tropical forests and woodlands near riverways, streams, swamplands, and other wetlands, to savannahs, and often around human habitations, irrigated croplands, and agricultural areas as well.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD), depending on the species.

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

These large species of Oriental, or Indo-Chinese ratsnakes can range from 8 to 18 inches as hatchlings, and approximately 5 1/2 to 9 feet, or approximately 70 to 108 inches as most adults depending on the species and subspecies. Some species of Oriental ratsnakes can reach larger sizes upwards of 10 to 14 feet as well, or 120 to 168 inches, sometimes making them the second largest species of snakes in their ranges after the Asiatic pythons.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling to juvenile Indo-Chinese ratsnakes can be housed in a 20 gallon long or tall terrarium or enclosure. Adult Indo-Chinese ratsnakes should be housed in a minimum of a 4 to 6 foot by 2 foot long terrarium or enclosure. These ratsnakes are semi-arboreal, and height can be just as important as floor space for this species. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding and that retains humidity well such as cypress mulch, orchid bark, 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, branches, driftwood, perches, or other hides. Also be sure to include a sturdy water bowl or dish as well. Additional humid hides can be provided as well for additional humidity.

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 these ratsnakes range from 75 to 85 degrees F on the cool side and 85 to 90 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

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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, the Indo-Chinese or Oriental ratsnakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird eggs, smaller reptiles and amphibians, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, these ratsnakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Once established, however, these species of ratsnakes may accept nearly any feeder items designated for carnivorous reptiles, including chicks or quail, chicken hearts and gizzards, eggs, and other food items. Some specimens may also initially prefer amphibians, snakes, or other reptiles or amphibians in their diets in order to become further established. In most circumstances, it is recommended to provide humanely pre-killed rodents or other food animals 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 Oriental, or Indo-Chinese 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. As with many species, there is some variability in temperaments among these rat snake species. Some individuals can become very docile, reluctant to bite, and tolerant of regular handling, while others may remain remaining somewhat aggressive, flighty, or otherwise irascible snakes. Nevertheless, these species of Old World ratsnakes are very active, intelligent, and perceptive species of snakes that are sure to not disappoint.

****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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