



Prairie and Mole Kingsnakes *Lampropeltis calligaster*

- Kingsnakes derive their common names from their well known habit of consuming other snake species, including indigenous venomous snakes.
- Prairie kingsnakes range from the central and Midwestern, to southeastern United States. They occupy fields, meadows, prairies, and agricultural areas.
- These species are relatively small to medium sized colubrids with a ground color of light to dark brown, reddish brown, or olive brown with three rows of darker brown to reddish alternating blotches. Blotches and patterning often become considerably less conspicuous on adult specimens. Some specimens may also be striped.
- If provided the proper care, king snakes can attain longevity of 15-20 years or more.

Size

Ranges from 5-10 inches as hatchlings, and 3-4 feet on average (36-48 inches) for most adults.

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling king snakes can be housed in a 10-15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult king snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20-30 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. King 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 king snakes (which are primarily nocturnal). Ideal temperatures for king 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, king snakes will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds and bird eggs and occasionally other snakes. Hatchlings and juveniles will occasionally feed on frogs or small lizards.

Most hatchlings can be started off on pinkie mice every 3-5 days. Food items can gradually be increased as needed. Most adult king snakes can be fed adult mice to small adult rats once every 5-7 days. Prairie and mole kingsnakes are generally good eaters in captivity, although hatchlings may be initially finicky. 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 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 prairie and mole king snakes will become more docile and tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older.

****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****