



\*Andre Saunders

## Rainbow Boas (*Epicrates cenchria* ssp.)

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### Rainbow Iridescence

Rainbow boas are a medium sized, terrestrial to semi-arboreal boas that can vary in coloration and appearance depending on the subspecies. The most commonly kept subspecies are the Brazilian rainbow boa (*E. cenchria cenchria*), Argentine rainbow boa (*E. cenchria alvarezi*), Peruvian rainbow boa (*E. cenchria gaigeae*), and the Colombian rainbow boa (*E. cenchria maurus*). Rainbow boas are known for their iridescent and colorful skin and scales, which reflect patterns of light similar to a prism, giving them their iridescence and popular names. These snakes have a reddish to reddish orange ground color with large lighter orange blotches outlined in black. They also have black and cream colored spots along the side resembling “bull’s eyes”. The Colombian species has more obscured or faded patterning on an orangish, brown, to orange-brown ground color. Rainbow boas are popular mid-sized boas to maintain as pets. If provided the proper care, rainbow boas can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more.

### 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:** Boidae

**Subfamily:** Boinae

**Genus:** *Epicrates*

**Species:** *Epicrates cenchria*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, rainbow boas can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years, although up to 30 to 40 years is not uncommon.

### Distribution and Habitat

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Rainbow boas range from the southern portion of Central America, throughout much of South America including the Amazon basin depending on their subspecies and locality. They can occur in the tropical forests and woodlands to savannahs, scrubland, and semi-desert habitats within their ranges.

### **Conservation Status**

Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Rainbow boas range from 8 to 12 inches as neonates, and 5 to 7 feet, or 54 to 84 inches as adults depending on the species and subspecies.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Neonate to juvenile rainbow boas can be started out in a 20 gallon long terrarium or similar sized enclosure, but will soon require larger accommodations. If glass enclosures are used at any point, be sure that the enclosure retains sufficient humidity. Many of the commercially made plastic or fiberglass enclosures, or otherwise custom-designed enclosures that can retain heat and humidity well are perhaps the best and most practical enclosures to use to house mid to large sized boas and pythons. Depending on the age and size of the animal, a four to six foot by two foot enclosure or larger is required. Rainbow boas can be maintained on a substrate of cage liner material, cypress mulch, sphagnum moss, or sphagnum fir mixtures, but always ensure that the substrate does not become too damp or moist. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Rainbow boas will also require a large sturdy water dish or tub that must be cleaned, sanitized, and changed regularly, especially if dirtied. Providing an adequately sized hidebox, artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, logs, and other cage furnishings can also provide additional hiding and basking opportunities. Rainbow boas will climb if given the opportunity, but floor space is more important than height.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Humidity is important with rainbow boas, although the Colombian subspecies is more tolerant of lower humidity than Brazilians. Too much ventilation will result in humidity loss. 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 rainbow boas range from 75 to 82 degrees F on the cool side and 85 to 92 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, rainbow boas are carnivorous, and will prey upon a wide range of small mammals, birds, and other reptiles that they can ambush and consume. In captivity,

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rainbow boas can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. In most general circumstances, it is recommended to provide humanely pre-killed prey animals acquired from a reputable source, as offering live animals to any snake can carry risk of serious injury or even death to your snake when the prey item bites to defend itself or otherwise gnaws on your animal. A general rule of thumb when selecting feeder prey item 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 these things can be alarming, 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, young and juvenile rainbow boas may initially be nervous and defensive. They may coil and strike if they feel threatened or defensive. Handle your rainbow boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Many rainbow boas will become docile and more tolerant or 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\*\***

### **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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