



# Red Tailed Ratsnake (*Gonyosoma oxycephalum*)

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## Green Bush Racers from Southeast Asia

The red tailed ratsnake is a large, arboreal species of colubrid, and more specifically, old world ratsnake species. Other common names for this species can include the red tailed racer, red tailed green ratsnake/racer, green bush racer/ratsnake, and arboreal ratsnake. This is a smooth scaled snake with a usually green ground color (sometimes with darker netlike patterning), and a pale reddish, reddish brown, or grayish-brown tail. Other unique identifying features of this species include a narrow, dark ocular stripe on each side of the head, and their distinctly blue tongues. A grayish colored variant is also occasionally seen, with yellowish to yellowish-orange heads. Red tailed ratsnakes are large colubrids that can be diurnal, crepuscular, and nocturnal, and often hunt and seek refuge in trees, tree cavities, and other vegetation. As with other ratsnake species, red tailed ratsnakes are strong and agile climbers, often ascending trees, shrubs, barns, and other outbuildings in search of shelter and/or food in the form of small reptiles, birds, eggs, and mammals. This species can be irascible and defensive when disturbed, rapidly vibrating their tail tips, musking and defecating, and/or coiling into a defensive strike posture. Nonetheless, red tailed ratsnakes can make for a satisfying and easily maintained species in captivity for the intermediate level 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:** Colubrinae

**Genus:** *Gonyosoma*

**Species:** *Gonyosoma oxycephalum*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

## Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, red tailed rat snakes can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more in captivity.

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### **Distribution and Habitat**

Red tailed ratsnakes are indigenous to the tropical rainforests, caves, swamps, marshes, and other vegetation often near water sources of southern to southeastern Asia. This species occurs in Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

### **Conservation Status**

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

### **Size**

Red tailed ratsnakes are large species, ranging from 15 to 18 inches as hatchlings, and typically 5 to 8 feet as adults, or approximately 60 to 96 inches.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling red tailed ratsnakes can be housed in a 20 gallon long or tall terrarium or enclosure. Adult red tailed ratsnakes should be housed in a minimum of a 40 to 55 gallon tall or long terrarium or enclosure. Red tailed 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 red tailed ratsnakes 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**

***Carnivorous;*** In the wild, red tailed ratsnakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, smaller reptiles and amphibians, bird eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, Red-tailed ratsnakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice, although some may require initial scenting. 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

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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**

Red tailed ratsnakes are known for being a defensive species, often coiling the front third of their bodies into a defensive "S" posture, and inflating their necks, throats, and mid-bodies while gaping and tail rattling/wagging when disturbed or threatened. This is a species that requires very confident care and handling, perhaps best provided by the more intermediate to advanced enthusiast. With slow, gentle, deliberate, and confident handling, however, red tailed ratsnakes can be handled, and over time, can become more tolerant of handling. As with most snakes, hatchlings and juveniles can often be more nervous and prone to be nippy, although adults can still be somewhat nervous and flighty as well.

**\*\*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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