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Rhinoceros Rat Snake (*Rhynchophis boulengeri*)

A Colubrid with a Unique Projection

Rhino ratsnakes are a unique old world ratsnake species, also known as the rhinoceros ratsnake, Vietnamese longnose snake, or sometimes simply rhinoceros snake or green unicorn. They are a slender bodied, semi arboreal snake that undergoes an ontogenetic color change from hatchlings and juveniles to adults. Young specimens range in color from grayish to tan, or grayish brown with irregular speckling, and often become vibrant green as adults. A narrow dark band runs along each side of the head, and perhaps the most prominent identifying feature of this species is its long, protruding nasal horn”, the function or purpose of which is not fully known. Rhinoceros rat snakes are primarily a nocturnal to crepuscular species, although they may be diurnal as well under the correct conditions.

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: Rhynchophis

Species: *Rhynchophis boulengeri**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, rhinoceros ratsnakes can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The rhinoceros ratsnake is a very unusual species of medium sized to large, arboreal to semi-arboreal Old World ratsnake indigenous to southern, southeastern, to eastern Asia. More specifically, this unique species occurs in northern Vietnam, and into southern China. Within this range, rhinoceros ratsnakes occupy primarily arboreal to semi-arboreal environments, including dry to tropical savannahs, and tropical to subtropical forests and woodlands, where they may be

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found thermoregulating, foraging, and seeking refuge in areas of above ground branches and other vegetation, often near bodies of water and other wetlands.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

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.

Size

Rhinoceros ratsnakes range from about 5 to 10 inches as hatchlings, and typically 3 to 4 ½ feet, or 36 to 54 inches as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling rhinoceros ratsnakes can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult rhinoceros ratsnakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 40 gallon tall terrarium or enclosure. Rhinoceros 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, climbing, 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

Rhino rat snakes originate from relatively milder climates in their natural range, and husbandry should reflect these similar temperatures. 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. UVA/UVB lighting, although not required for most snakes, can greatly benefit their overall health and well-being. Ideal temperatures for rhino snakes can range from a gradient of 75 to 80 degrees F, with temperatures not to exceed 88 to 90 degrees F for prolonged periods of time. 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, rhinoceros ratsnakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also often eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, rhinoceros ratsnakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice, although hatchlings and juveniles may initially require scenting with lizards or frogs. 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

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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

Rhino rat snakes are a shy, but typically docile species. Juveniles can occasionally be nippy or prone to act defensively, but with regular handling and interaction, most will outgrow this behavior. As with many snakes, hatchling and juveniles especially may oftentimes initially be nervous and defensive due mostly to their smaller size. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle these snakes of any age or size gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal.

****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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