



Tarter or Russian Sand Boa (*Eryx tataricus*)

Un-Explored Old Worlds

The Tartar, or Russian sand boa is a medium sized to large old world sand boa species indigenous to the steppes and foothills of the Middle East, and into western Asia, including western China and Mongolia. Although relatively little more is currently known about this species' habits and natural history, it is a sedentary ambush predator of smaller mammals, birds, and reptiles, as with other sand boas, and will conceal themselves in loose substrate with only their eyes and/or head exposed. This is a moderate to large sand boa with a light to dark brown, olive brown, to yellowish brown ground color with a series of darker irregular dorsal blotches or markings. A post-ocular stripe on each side of the head is also present, and in some specimens, a reddish-orange wash may also be present on the anterior portion of the body. Although many specimens of this species remain wild caught, captive bred specimens are also available. For those searching for a less commonly seen and kept species of sand boa, or other erycinae species, the Tartar sand boa may be a suitable choice for the more intermediate to moderate 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: Boidae

Subfamily: Erycinae

Genus: *Eryx*

Species: *Eryx tataricus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Tartar sand boas can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more. They

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may reach up to even 35 to 40 years.

Distribution and Habitat

The range and distribution of the Tartar sand boa is not well known or documented due to difficulty in identifying this taxon. However, from what is known, this species ranges from the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia east to western Asia, where it is found in the steppes, grasslands, and mountainous foothills of these regions within this range. Further within this range, Tartar sand boas occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-fossorial environments, including sandy to rocky environments, including the dry to semi-arid sub-deserts, to dune areas, scrublands, scrub-savannahs, grasslands, and agricultural and suburban or residential areas near human habitations. While these species of sand boas are commonly believed to, and do prefer habitats with sandy, viable soil, they can also occur in other such habitats mentioned above as well.

Conservation Status

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

Legal and Regulatory Status(*Subject to Change)

Boidae spp. are CITES Appendix II (Except the species included in Appendix I) as of October 2017. Also consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Tartar sand boas are a mid-sized to large sand boa species, with some adult females reaching approximately 4 feet (or 48 inches), although 1 ½ to 2 ½ feet, or 18 to 30 inches is more typical. Neonates range from 4 to 7 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Neonate Tartar sand boas can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult Tartar sand boas should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Tartar sand boas are primarily terrestrial, and floor space is more important than height. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding such as fine aspen shavings, orchid bark, or play sand mixtures. 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, driftwood, or other hides. Also be sure to include a sturdy water bowl or dish as well.

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 Tartar sand 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

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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, Tartar sand boas are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, amphibians, smaller reptiles, and other smaller vertebrates. In captivity, Tartar sand boas can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Newborn, juvenile, and some adult sand boas may require scenting with frogs or lizards, however. In most general 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 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, young and juvenile sand boas may initially be more nervous and defensive. Handle your sand boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. As adults, Tartar sand boas tend to be a large docile species of sand boa, although neonates may be somewhat nippy.

****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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