



*Niki Presson

Trans Pecos Rat Snake (*Bogertophis subocularis*)

Secretive Southwestern Spectacles

Trans Pecos rat snakes are a mild mannered, secretive, and primarily nocturnal to crepuscular species that tends to be primarily terrestrial to semi arboreal, climbing into trees, bushes, or rock outcroppings to seek food or shelter. The ground color of this species ranges from yellowish to tan (with some blue phase specimens known) with a series of dark brown or black dorsal stripes projecting from the neck and anterior third of the body, grading into dark chevron or “H” shaped dorsal blotches. The eyes are fairly large and bulging, and this species is named for its row of subocular scales between their eyes and upper labial scales. This species is docile, inquisitive, and mild mannered, although defensive behaviors typical of ratsnakes when disturbed can include rapidly vibrating their tail tips, musking and defecating, and/or coiling into a defensive strike posture. Nonetheless, Trans Pecos ratsnakes are a hardy, bold, active, inquisitive, and easily maintained species in captivity.

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: *Bogertophis*

Species: *Bogertophis subocularis**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

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

Distribution and Habitat

The Trans Pecos ratsnake is an unusual, medium sized to large, terrestrial to semi-arboreal colubrid snake indigenous to the extreme southwestern United States and northern Mexico. More specifically, this species occurs in the Mexican locality of Coahuila, northeastern Chihuahua, Coahuila, northeastern Durango, Nuevo León, and northward into small portions of extreme south-central to southwestern U.S. Within this range, Trans Pecos ratsnakes occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-arboreal environments, including arid to semi-arid desert flatlands and scrublands, to brushlands, where this species is rather secretive, favoring burrows, rocky areas, rocky outcroppings, and other ground or surface debris and vegetation.

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

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Trans Pecos ratsnakes range from 5 to 10 inches as hatchlings, and about 3 to 5 feet, or 36 to 54 inches as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling Trans Pecos ratsnakes can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult Trans Pecos ratsnakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Trans Pecos ratsnakes are semi-arboreal, but floor space is more important than height. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding such as cage carpet or cage liner, fine aspen shavings, cypress mulch, 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, 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 Trans Pecos 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, Trans Pecos ratsnakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and

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juveniles will also often eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, Trans Pecos ratsnakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice, although they may require 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 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, hatchling and juvenile Trans Pecos rat snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle them gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. In general though, the Trans Pecos rat snake tends to be a mild mannered and inoffensive species, making them a suitable and attractive choice for a pet snake species.

****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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