



Phoenix Herpetological Society
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BOA CONSTRICTOR

(Boa constrictor)

These tropical snakes are among the most common and well known species in the hobby. They are mainly terrestrial, and are found throughout Colombia and adjacent countries. Typically encountered in the jungles, they are a highly adaptable species, and are sometimes found in close proximity to human establishments.

Colombian boas are captive bred in large numbers, and a wide variety of amazing color and pattern morphs are produced regularly by a handful of dedicated breeders. These morphs, though pricey, only add to the intrigue and demand of this species. Due to their impressive but manageable size, beautiful colors, and friendly demeanor, Colombian boas make excellent pets for keepers willing to provide the space for an adult specimen.

Size and Longevity

With few exceptions, there is a marked size difference between males and females of this species. Males are typically smaller, and average 6 feet in length. Females are more heavy-bodied, and can approach 8 feet as mature adults. Boas are very long-lived snakes. With proper care, this species can easily live 20 to 30 years.

Housing

Babies, and boas up to 2 years old, can be comfortably housed in an appropriately sized glass terrarium. 10 to 20 gallons is fine for newborns, but boas grow quickly, and larger quarters will soon be needed.

Adult boas should be given as much space as possible. Generally, a single adult should have no less than a 6 foot wide and 2 foot deep enclosure. Larger enclosures will be needed if housing multiple snakes together. At these large sizes, glass cages are rarely practical or economical. Specialty reptile cages are recommended, with Vision brand cages being among the best. Penn Plax brand cages are another cage option that provides a visually appealing, furniture like cage suitable for boas.

Heating and Lighting

Colombian boas are tropical, and their enclosures should be maintained at around 80 degrees with a basking spot in the mid to high 90's. Heat pads, basking bulbs, infrared lights, and ceramic heat emitters will all work for heating boas. Make sure to use a good thermometer on each end of the cage to ensure proper temperatures are being achieved.

Supplemental lighting is not required for keeping boas. Fluorescent bulbs are excellent to simulate a natural day/night cycle, as well as enhance the natural colors of your boa, but it is not necessary for their survival.

Substrate and Furnishings

Any number of substrates may be used for Colombian boas. Typically humidity promoting beddings such as bark, coco bedding, or a mixture of the two are used.

Baby boas will spend more time exploring their enclosures than adults. For younger snakes, consider adding a variety of sticks, logs, hiding spots, and plants to the terrarium. Larger snakes should be kept in simpler setups. This aids in the cleaning process, not to mention that a large boa will rearrange anything that you place in the cage anyway!

Water and Humidity

Boas should be provided with a water dish large enough for them to soak in should they choose to do so. Humidity can be easily maintained by misting the entire enclosure once a day with room temperature water.

Feeding

Colombian boas will eat one appropriately sized rodent every 7 to 10 days for their entire lives. Babies will take large fuzzies or small hoppers for their first few meals, but will graduate quickly to small adult mice. As the snakes grow, so should their prey, with the food item leaving a barely noticeable lump in your snake. Large adults will require very large rats or rabbits 3 to 4 times a month.

Handling

Part of what makes Colombian boas such a popular pet is their even temper and reluctance to bite. Although no snake should be handled excessively, boas may be handled gently on a regular basis as long as no obvious signs of stress become apparent.

As with any snake over 6 feet, act responsibly with your pet. Do not take large snakes into public places where you may be held liable for startling unsuspecting bystanders.

Observation Journal

Professional breeders and biologists always keep a record of each animal. PHS does the same for the over 1700 animals currently housed at the facility. While this is a very time-consuming task, it is vital for the life and health of each animal. We teach PHS Summer Camp students how to accurately record and keep a journal and how it benefits both the owner and animal.

Below is an example of an Observation Journal for a ball python:

Male: Noah

Card #1

Ball Python, Spider
Python Regius

Born: mid 2009
Arrived: 2009

Date	Action	Weight	Notes
1-22-10	shed		Finally complete
1-23-10	mouse		
1-29-10	Fed mouse; bit; didn't eat		Neosporin and damp paper towels, healed nicely
1-30-10	f/t mouse		
2-4-10	mouse		
2-6-10		175g	
2-7-10	mouse		
8-8-10		200g	
2-10-10	mouse		
2-14-10	mouse		
2-19-10	mouse		
2-24-10	mouse		
3-2-10	mouse		
3-5-10	shed		complete
3-13-10	mouse		
3-18-10	mouse	241g	Bit <i>again</i> , Neosporin, doesn't look too bad
3-22-10	mouse		Healing very nicely

Keeping an accurate record of feedings, shedding, and regular activities is important. It will be easy to notice a change in behavior which indicates possible illness or problems if you have records to review. A simple spiral notebook kept next to the enclosure is all that is needed.