

ROSY BOA CARE SHEET

(*Lichanura trivirgata*)

****For generalized, background information on snake care and husbandry, please see the "General Snake Care Sheet" first****

Rosy boas are one of two small, stout bodied species of boa native to the United States; the rocky, arid to semi arid regions of the southwestern U.S., and into Baja Mexico. These secretive and docile boas are primarily nocturnal predators of rodents and small ground dwelling birds. While rosy boas are longitudinally striped, their color intensity and coloration can vary considerably from subspecies to subspecies, and from locality to locality. Given their relatively small size, docile tendencies, and attractive coloration, rosy boas are now widely kept and bred in the reptile industry.

***Overall Difficulty Level: Novice**

Rosy boas are a docile and hardy species that reach relatively small adult sizes. This makes rosy boas an ideal choice for the beginning reptile enthusiast provided they hold a general knowledge and understanding of reptile, and more specifically, snake husbandry. Given the proper care, rosy boas can attain longevity of 15-25 years on average in captivity.

Rosy Boa Taxonomy

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Serpentes

Family: Boidae

Subfamily: Erycinae

Genus: *Lichanura*

Species Epithet: *Lichanura trivirgata*

Size and Description

Neonate rosy boas typically range from five to eight inches in length. As adults, rosy boas can range from three to four feet on average (or 36-48"). Rosy boas are a small, heavy bodied, smooth scaled terrestrial boa (with a fairly blunt tail) that can be extremely variable in color. Ground color can be grayish blue, white, tan, cream colored or light brown with three longitudinal stripes that also vary in color and intensity depending on subspecies and locality. These longitudinal stripes can be red, reddish brown, pale orange, dark brown, to black. The head is typically fairly small, and lacks heat sensitive labial or facial pits. The head also lacks the enlarged dorsal head scales or plates that most other snakes possess.

Rosy Boa Subspecies in Herpetoculture:

Arizona Rosy Boa (*L. trivirgata arizonae*): Occur within the Dome Rock Mountains, Harquahala Mountains, Hualupai, and Harcuvar Mountain regions of Arizona. Ground color

ranges from cream colored to grayish with large, wide orangish, reddish orange, to brick red longitudinal stripes.

Coastal Rosy Boa (*L. trivirgata roseofusca*): Occurs in the coastal regions of Western California. Generally has a “muddy” appearance” with less well pronounced reddish, brownish red, to orangish longitudinal stripes or “zigzags” on a round color of grayish, blue-gray, to cream colored ground color.

Baja Rosy Boa (*L. trivirgata saslowi*): Occurs in the Baja peninsula of Mexico. Ground color is typically cream colored, grayish to pale yellow with reddish to pale orange longitudinal stripes.

Mexican Rosy Boa (*L. trivirgata trivirgata*): Occurs on the Mexican mainland. Ground color is cream colored to tannish with large, bold, dark chocolate brown to black longitudinal stripes.

Temperament and Handling

Rosy boas are normally a placid species and are often reluctant to bite in defense. It should be kept in mind however that even a supposedly docile snake may bite or react defensively if suddenly startled or frightened or when food is detected (resulting in a feeding response bite).

When handling any snakes, try to avoid grabbing or restraining the snake too tightly, as this may cause injury to the animal and/or force it to react defensively (as mentioned previously). Handle snakes of any age or size gently and avoid sudden rapid movements, particularly in front of or above the snake. Do not handle a snake for one to two days after feeding, or else the animal may regurgitate its meal. It is also important to practice basic hygienic and sanitary measures when keeping reptiles (or any animal) as a precaution against contracting zoonotic diseases such as salmonellosis.

Enclosure/Housing

The enclosure you choose must be secure to prevent the escape of the inhabitant and provide adequate ventilation. Neonate to juvenile rosy boas can be maintained in a 10-15 gallon long glass terrarium with a secure screen top. Larger numbers of hatchling rosy boas can be kept in commercially available rack systems consisting of appropriately sized plastic shoe box sized containers with holes punched or melted in for ventilation. These containers are made by Iris, Rubbermaid, and Sterilite. Racks are usually heated with Flexwatt heat tape either installed along the back wall of the rack as back heat or on the rear half of the floor of each slot as belly heat, and should be monitored with a quality thermostat.

Adult rosy boas can easily be maintained in a 20-gallon long glass terrarium or similar sized enclosure. Adult rosy boas can also be kept in commercially available rack systems consisting of appropriate sized sweater box sized containers (28-32 quart or similar sized), as previously described.

A hide-box for allowing the snake to retreat from view is recommended as part of a terrarium setup as well. Besides commercially available hide boxes, you could modify many things to serve as a hide box. They can include opaque plastic storage container, plastic litter pans for cats,

and inverted flowerpots for example. A small water dish should also be provided within the enclosure on the cool side and be changed once weekly or sooner if fouled. The dish should be heavy enough so that it isn't easily tipped over (plastic or ceramic crock dishes work well). It should also be cleaned and disinfected periodically.

Temperature and Heating

As with all reptiles, rosy boas are ectothermic animals, meaning it is important to provide them with an external heat source and thermal gradient for proper digestion and gestation. There should be a warm side and a cooler side to the enclosure. To create the warm side, you can use an under tank heater (UTH), Flexwatt heat tape, or a radiant heat panel on one half of the enclosure. Many commercially available plastic and PVC enclosures and racks come with their own heating elements. The warm side should remain around 85-90 degrees Fahrenheit. It is also important to disallow any snake to come into direct contact with any heating element, as thermal burns can result, and can sometimes be severe, requiring professional veterinary attention. Excess moisture buildup inside the cage should also be avoided since rosy boas occur naturally in arid to semi arid environments. UV or other overhead lighting is not required for most species of snakes, particularly nocturnal species such as rosy boas.

Substrate

The substrate is the enclosure's bedding. Substrates that enable burrowing such as play sand, Carefresh, cypress mulch, or aspen shavings are all acceptable substrates for rosy boas. Avoid pine and cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. The substrate should be kept dry and be spot cleaned when needed to reduce the likelihood of bacterial outbreaks. A complete substrate change and replacement should be done periodically as well, with that interval depending on the substrate being used.

Feeding and Diet

As with all boas and pythons, rosy boas are non venomous constrictors, although smaller prey items may be seized and swallowed without constriction. Rosy boas in their native range will feed on rodents and other small mammals, small ground dwelling birds, and occasionally lizards.

Neonate rosy boas can be started off two to three times weekly on pinkie mice or fuzzie mice. The size of the prey item should be increased accordingly as the snake grows. A general rule of thumb to follow is to offer prey items that are no larger than the widest point of the snake. Adult rosy boas can be offered adult mice every five to seven days. It is important to not to overfeed your rosy boa, since obesity and compromised health of the snake can result over time. On occasion, some neonate or juvenile hognose snakes may be fussier eaters and may initially accept only frogs, toads, or lizard prey items. In these cases, if one wishes to switch the snake over to rodents, various scenting techniques may need to be performed. In some cases, mixing the rodent prey item within a bag of the preferred prey item will work. Other scenting options that are available may not be for the weak of stomach however. These feeding techniques typically include splitting, or "braining" the food item to entice a feeding response.

Summary

Rosy boas have long been a popular and widespread species to maintain and propagate in the herpetocultural hobby and industry, due to interest from many in both specific locality animals as well as several morphs which have become available. Unfortunately, popularity of these terrestrial and primarily nocturnal species in recent years, however, seems to have declined in favor of some other species. Nevertheless, all of the rosy boa subspecies can make for quite simple and straightforward animals to maintain or propagate in captivity due to their small adult sizes, and typically docile and inoffensive disposition in combination with the tremendous color and pattern diversity and intensity among the subspecies and even among localities.