

YELLOW ANACONDA CARE SHEET

(Eunectes notaeus)

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

Yellow anacondas (also known as water boas), which are members of the boidae family, are smaller than the more well known Green Anaconda. These sub aquatic boas are found in the regularly flooded areas, rivers, and tributaries of South America including Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. One of the adaptations of these semi aquatic snakes are high set eyes on their heads, enabling them to see both prey and potential predators while partially submerged. As with most boas, Yellow anacondas are ovo-viviparous, giving birth to up to 40 young.

*Overall Difficulty Level: Advanced

Yellow anacondas can become medium to large boas that many feel are somewhat aggressive and/or unpredictable. Therefore, potential keepers of a Yellow Anaconda should be familiar and experienced with the care and handling of large and aggressive/unpredictable snakes. Anacondas are not a snake for the beginner. Given the proper care, Yellow anacondas can attain longevity of 25-35 years on average in captivity, sometimes longer.

Yellow anacondas can attain somewhat large sizes, and combined with their typically unpredictable dispositions, are not suitable for the inexperienced reptile keeper or handler. Do your research well before acquiring a large snake!

Yellow Anaconda Taxonomy

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Serpentes

Family: Boidae

Subfamily: Boinae

Genus: Eunectes

Species Epithet: *Eunectes notaeus*

Size and Description

Yellow anaconda neonates can be as large as 24". As adults, males typically attain lengths of seven to eight feet (84-96") while females typically attain larger sizes of up to 12 feet (144"). These boas are typically golden-yellow to greenish yellow in color with numerous dark dorsal spots and blotches, and smaller lateral dark spots, flecks, and streaks on each side. There is often one to two dark post ocular stripes radiating away from each eye and two or three larger and more prominent dark streaks radiating away from the relatively high set eyes on the top of the head. There are labial heat pits present in all anaconda species.

There are currently a few color and pattern morphs of Yellow Anaconda in the industry, including Anerythristics, Axanthics, Hypos, Marble, and Patternless phases.

Temperament and Handling

As mentioned previously, many keepers of anacondas believe that this species is somewhat aggressive and/or unpredictable to handle. In general though neonates and juveniles are often initially more defensive and adept to strike in self defense (they will frequently gape and hiss, musk/defecate, and attempt to bite in response to a perceived threat (you handling them). If one really wants a relatively handleable anaconda, the best course of action to take would be to seek out a well established captive born specimen from a reputable source, and take the time to handle the animal in a gentle and deliberate manner. Over time, your anaconda will be more likely to trust its keeper and better respond to being handled. 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).

Yellow anacondas can potentially become large and powerful snakes as adults. Therefore it is important to handle large snakes safely and correctly by not placing a snake around your neck or upper torso, or allowing unsupervised contact with young children or others who may not be experienced in handling a large snake. Every incident involving a snake, or other reptile, undoubtedly fuels further legislation against keeping reptiles and further sensationalized negative publicity/media coverage towards the reptile hobby as a whole. When handling or interacting with a large snake such as an anaconda, is often has been suggested that at least a second person be present or at least within calling distance.*

Enclosure/Housing

The enclosure you choose must be secure to prevent the escape of the inhabitant and provide adequate ventilation. Neonate to juvenile yellow anacondas can be maintained in a 20-30 gallon long glass terrarium with a secure screen top. To retain adequate humidity if using a glass terrarium, the screen top can be partially covered with an appropriate sized piece of glass while still enabling adequate ventilation. Larger numbers of hatchling to juvenile anacondas can be kept in commercially available rack systems consisting of appropriately sized plastic shoe to sweater box sized containers (28-32 quart or similar sized) 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.

It should be noted that adult yellow anacondas can become large and powerful snakes which require very sturdy and secure escape proof caging, preferably with locking mechanisms.* The most practical caging for housing adult anacondas are the commercially available plastic, melamine, wooden, or PVC enclosures with front opening sliding or hinged glass or acrylic doors. These types of enclosures provide increased security for snakes within them and space can be better utilized with them since they are stackable. Adequate temperature and humidity can also be easily maintain in these enclosures, and most are available with built in lighting and heating elements. Depending on the size of the snake, up to 72" X 24" (or six foot by two foot) caging may be required for some of the larger female snakes. It is therefore

important to consider whether one has space to adequately house and maintain a large constrictor prior to obtaining one. Although not an absolute necessity, Yellow anacondas are largely semi aquatic by nature, and would greatly benefit from being provided a large enough water bowl, container, or other area of the cage for the snake to enter or soak in. Due to this, frequent water changes and adequate filtration will have to be installed and performed as a result, since yellow anacondas will frequently urinate and defecate in the water.

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. In order to provide the proper level of humidity necessary for yellow anacondas, a humidity box (which can also serve as a hide box) should be provided in the enclosure. The humidity box can be a clear or opaque plastic container with a hole cut out on the top or side and lined with a sphagnum moss substrate on the inside. A water dish should also be provided within the enclosure and be changed at least 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, yellow anacondas 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 90-92 degrees Fahrenheit and the ambient cage temperate in the mid eighties. 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. UV or other overhead lighting is not required for most species of snakes, including yellow anacondas. However, overhead UV lighting or fluorescent lighting can improve the cage's aesthetics as well as visibility within.

Substrate

The substrate is the enclosure's bedding. Newspaper, commercially available cage liner material, cypress mulch, or coconut husk fibers are all acceptable substrates for yellow anacondas. 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, yellow anacondas are non venomous constrictors. In their native range, they will feed on a variety of rodents and other small to medium sized mammals, birds, lizards, turtles, and even occasionally caimen (south American crocodilians).

Neonate yellow anacondas can be started off in captivity once every five to seven days on rat pups or rat “crawlers”. The size of the prey item should then 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. As adults, most yellow anacondas will take large adult rats to pre-killed rabbits. Many yellow anacondas, like other large snakes, normally have very strong feeding responses and seldom present any refusals to feed. A large snake can be a powerful and potentially dangerous animal at feeding time when it detects food in the vicinity. Therefore it is important to not let the scent of the prey item come into contact with you. Otherwise you will be mistaken as food. Despite their strong feeding responses, it is important to not overfeed your yellow anaconda, since obesity and compromised health of the snake can result over time.

Summary

Of the two Anaconda species that are most commonly kept in captivity (the other being the Green Anaconda, *E. murinus*), the Yellow Anaconda (*E. notaeus*) is perhaps the more popular and widely kept of the two in the herpetocultural industry, amounting to its relatively smaller adult size than its green relative. Due to this species's semi-aquatic habits (thus requiring frequent cage cleaning and disinfecting), relatively large size, and their often proneness to biting, and of Anacondas in general, overall make the yellow anaconda a suitable choice to maintain only by zoological facilities and by experienced and dedicated herpetoculturists. Depending on how the animal is raised and handled, maintaining a Yellow anaconda can either be a complete nightmare of an experience characterized by an often extremely nervous and defensive animal that is prone and ready to bite or strike at the slightest human provocation, or they can make for relatively calm, alert, and suitable adult animals to maintain in captivity if handled and interacted with consistently from an early age. The yellow anaconda overall has continued to enjoy a small, yet dedicated following in herpetoculture, with even a small number of Yellow anaconda morphs now available including Hypos, Marbles, Axanthics, and Patterless morphs.