



*Photo Credit: LLLReptile

African House Snakes (*Lamprophis spp.*) and (*Boaedon spp.*)

Hardy and Often Underrated

African house snakes are relatively small to medium sized, secretive colubrids consisting of about 20 to 22 species. African House snakes range throughout most of sub Saharan Africa. Commonly kept species include the Aurora House snake (*L. aurora*), Cape House snake (*B. capensis*), and Striped, or Lined House snake (*B. lineatus*). Depending on the species and locality, these snakes can be quite variable in color and pattern. Colors can range from brown, reddish brown, reddish orange, to blackish with lighter colored stripes and/or faint blotches. Eyes are large, and pupils typically elliptical. These snakes most often tend to be crepuscular, and primarily terrestrial, although they can also swim and climb well in search of small mammals and birds, as well as to seek refuge. Overall, African house snakes are a very hardy, easily kept, and underrated genus of snakes that can make for excellent pet snakes for the beginner to advanced keeper, breeder, or enthusiast alike.

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: Lamprophiidae

Subfamily: Lamprophiinae/Pseudoxyrhophiinae

Genus: Lamprophis and Boaedon

Species: *Lamprophis spp.** and *Boaedon spp.**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, African house snakes are hardy snakes that can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The African house snakes are species of relatively small to medium sized, secretive nocturnal to crepuscular colubrid snakes which range widely across Africa and the Middle East. Depending

upon the exact species and subspecies, species in this genus can range from the Republic of South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana, to further north in Africa, including Mali, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Species also occur from Senegal, Gambia, Guineau-Bissau, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Niger, to Nigeria, Chad, Gabon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Ivory Coast. Within this range, African house snakes occupy a variety of primarily terrestrial, to semi-fossorial, to semi-arboreal environments, including dry to semi-dry open forests and woodlands, to savannahs, grasslands, and scrublands, and agricultural and suburban to residential areas, often being found in and around burrows, as well as houses and other buildings and natural or manmade structures and debris.

Origin/History

Boaedon spp. A.M.C. Duméril, Bibron, & Duméril, 1854; Lamprophis Fitzinger, 1843. Specific species would have other authors first describing them in different years.

There is not much information available as to when African house snakes were first kept or imported, although they have been more many decades, since at least the 1970's or 1980's. They would not be as popular as many other pet snake speices, due perhaps to their relatively smaller sizes and nondescript coloration, but were still easy to keep. While a few are still imported from Africa to this day, the vast majority would then become hardy and easily kept snakes in captivity that would feed and reproduce well in captivity. Now, an increasing number of color and pattern morphs and mutations of several species of the African house snakes are becoming available in captivity.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner.

Size

African house snakes range from 5 to 8 inches as hatchlings, and 2 to 5 feet, or 24 to 54 inches as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Fossorial. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling African house snakes can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult house snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. African house snakes 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, 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 African house snakes 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. African house snakes should be maintained at moderate relative humidity levels from about 50 to 70%, depending on the exact species and subspecies, with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, African house snakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, African house snakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. 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 house snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. House snakes may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your house snake gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Many house snakes will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older.

****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

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Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. We cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety.

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