



*Ryan McVeigh

Amazon Tree Boa (*Corallus hortulanus*)

Highly Variable “Garden” Tree Boas

Amazon tree boas are a very slender bodied, arboreal, medium sized boa species that can be extremely variable in color and pattern. They can range from reds, oranges, yellows, tans, blacks, olives, greens, or any combination thereof and some specimens may also be bi-colored. Like other arboreal snakes, Amazon tree boas also have highly prehensile tails that they use for climbing, anchoring, and gripping, as well as large eyes for optimal sight and vision, and large, broad heads as well. As with most species of boas and pythons, Amazon tree boas are nocturnal to crepuscular ambush hunters of smaller reptiles, amphibians, small birds, and small mammals which they use their heat sensitive labial pits to detect even in complete darkness. Amazon tree boas, as well as several other arboreal boa species, will also occasionally rest at the mouths of roosts or caves to ambush bats or small birds in mid-flight! Amazon tree boas are a colorful and highly variable yet very slender bodied species of boa that provide much excitement and enjoyment for the more experience enthusiast, but are best suited as an intermediate level to advanced species of snake.

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: Boidae

Subfamily: Boinae

Genus: *Corallus*

Species: *Corallus hortulanus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Amazon tree boas can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Amazon tree boas are indigenous to a wide area of the Amazonian basin of South America, and surrounding regions from southern Colombia, to Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Within this range, Amazon tree boas typically occupy the primarily arboreal habitats, including the understories to canopy layers of tropical to sub-tropical forests and woodlands, as well as occasionally near human habitations.

Origin/History

Corallus hortulana (Linnaeus, 1758).

There is not much specific information available as to when exactly Amazon tree boas were first kept or imported for the pet trade, although these slender arboreal boas have been present in the pet trade and herpetoculture for many decades, possibly since at least the 1960's or 1970's, where a vast majority would be wild-collected imports. ATBs became a fairly common export in the pet trade. About 3,000 of these snakes were exported live from Guiana in 2002, and 1,902 were exported from Suriname in the same year (CITES 2002). Now, however, Amazon tree boas have become more regularly bred in captivity.

Corallus cookii (also sometimes known as the Cook's tree boa) was once commonly traded. However, this species is native to only one island (St. Vincent), which has ceased exporting herpetofauna for commercial purposes (Mendez 2001).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Amazon tree boas range from 8 to 10 inches as neonates. Most adult Amazon tree boas range from 4 to 6 ½ feet in length, or 48 to about 78 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Arboreal. Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Neonate to juvenile Amazon tree boas can be started out in a 10 to 15 gallon tall terrarium or similar sized enclosure, but will soon require larger accommodations. If glass enclosures are used at any point, be sure that the enclosure retains sufficient humidity. Many of the commercially made plastic or fiberglass enclosures, or otherwise custom-designed enclosures that can retain heat and humidity well are perhaps the best and most practical enclosures to use to house these specialized, mid-sized boas. Depending on the age and size of the animal, a 20 to 40 gallon tall enclosure is required. Amazon tree boas can be maintained on a substrate of cage liner material, cypress mulch, sphagnum moss, or sphagnum fir mixtures, but always ensure that the substrate does not become too damp or moist. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide a water bowl at the bottom of the enclosure, and ample horizontal branches, vines, rocks, logs, and/or perches about the same width as the animal's body for climbing, basking, and hiding opportunities. Amazon tree boas are a strongly arboreal species, and enclosure height is more important than floor space.

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 Amazon tree boas range from 75 to 82 degrees F on the cool side and 85 to 92 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, and periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. This species is also susceptible to dehydration, and must be maintained at adequate humidity levels including by providing a large, shallow water bowl or dish. 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. Amazon tree boas should be maintained at relatively moderate to high relative humidity levels, from about 50 to 70%, with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, Amazon tree boas are carnivorous, and will prey upon a wide range of small mammals, birds, and other reptiles that they can ambush and consume. In captivity, Amazon tree boas can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Some Amazon tree boas may initially prefer lizards or frogs, however. In most general circumstances, it is recommended to provide humanely pre-killed prey animals acquired from a reputable source, as offering live animals to any snake can carry risk of serious injury or even death to your snake when the prey item bites to defend itself or otherwise gnaws on your animal. A general rule of thumb when selecting feeder prey item 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 these things can be alarming, 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

Amazon tree boas, as a general rule, are a less hands on or handleable species than many other species. Neonate Amazon tree boas have a delicate skeletal structure, and must be handled sparingly to prevent accidental injury to the animal. Although they have relatively long teeth, and are capable of inflicting an unpleasant bite, this is a species that can respond well to calm and deliberate handling (and each specimen has its own individual temperament & disposition) by removing the perch from the enclosure with the animal first, and then allowing it to voluntarily move from perch to hands from underneath. Forcing the animal from its enclosure will cause injury and/or further stress to the animal. While many Amazon tree boas can be handled for short periods of time in this manner, care should still be taken to not over stress these animals.

****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:

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