



**Photo Credit: Sunshine Serpents*

Baird's Ratsnake [*Pantherophis bairdii*]

Underrated "Southwesterners"

The Baird's ratsnake is a species of medium sized to large North American ratsnake ranging from the Big Bend region of western and southwestern Texas, through Mexico, namely the northern states of Mexico, including Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas. Within this range, Baird's ratsnakes can be found in semi-arid, rocky environments, which may range from shrublands, to open, dry forests or woodlands, or deserts to semi-deserts. This species especially favors rocky areas to support their semi-arboreal lifestyles, including caves, rocky areas with ample rock crevices, or canyon to cliff faces or walls.

The Baird's ratsnake can be surprisingly variable in coloration, and can range from a salmon pinkish brown to orange-yellow in ground color, with four longitudinal stripes similar to some eastern U.S. ratsnake species. Juveniles are often a more light, ashy grayish in ground color with darker, narrow "horse-shoe" blotches or saddles. As with other North American ratsnake species, Baird's ratsnakes are strong, arboreal to semi-arboreal snakes, and can be excellent climbers, climbing trees, cliff and rock faces, barns, and other outbuildings in search of refuge and smaller prey. Baird's ratsnakes are a very underrated species of snake in herpetoculture and the pet industry, but also are a hardy, and easily maintained species that anyone interested in North American snakes, or even snakes in general, should consider!

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: Colubridae

Subfamily: Colubrinae

Genus: *Pantherophis*

Species: *Pantherophis bairdii**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Baird's ratsnakes can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Baird's ratsnakes occur naturally from the Big Bend region of western and southwestern Texas, through Mexico, namely the northern states of Mexico, including Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas. Within this range, Baird's ratsnakes can be found in semi-arid, rocky environments, which may range from shrublands, to open, dry forests or woodlands, or deserts to semi-deserts. This species especially favors rocky areas to support their semi-arboreal lifestyles, including caves, rocky areas with ample rock crevices, or canyon to cliff faces or walls.

Origin/History

Pantherophis bairdi (Yarrow, 1880).

Baird's ratsnakes have long been kept in the pet trade and herpetoculture, but would often be an overlooked species. Part of this may have had to do with Baird's ratsnakes being a rather localized species which occupied environments less accessible than the corn snake or other North American ratsnake species. They would be mild-mannered snakes which could breed well in captivity. An exact timeline for when these snakes first entered the herpetocultural industry is lacking.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Baird's ratsnakes can range from about 5 to 12 inches as hatchlings, and 3 to 6 feet on average as adults, or 36 to 72 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Arboreal. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling Baird's ratsnakes can be housed in a 10 to 20 gallon long or tall terrarium or enclosure. Adult Baird's ratsnakes should be housed in a minimum of a 40 to 55 gallon tall or long terrarium or enclosure. These ratsnakes are semi-arboreal, and height can be just as important as floor space for this species. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding and that retains humidity well such as cypress mulch, orchid bark, 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, branches, driftwood, perches, or other hides. Also be sure to include a sturdy water bowl or dish as well. Additional humid hides can be provided as well for additional humidity.

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 Baird's ratsnakes 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. Baird's rat snakes should be maintained at relatively moderate relative humidity levels, and should range from about 30 to

60%, with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, Baird's ratsnakes 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, these ratsnakes 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 Baird's ratsnakes can be initially more nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle them gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Baird's ratsnakes, in general, however, tend to be a mild mannered and easily handled species compared to at least some other forms or species of other North American ratsnakes.

****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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