



**Photo Credit: Natalia Arnedo*

Baron's Racer (*Philodryas baroni*)

Green and Specialized

The Baron's Racer (*Philodryas baroni*) is a species of arboreal, mildly venomous (or rear-fanged) colubrid snake indigenous to northern South America, including northern Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia. These colubrid snakes are largely arboreal, spending much of their time seeking shelter and hunting for small birds, bird's eggs, lizards, frogs, and small rodents amongst bushes, shrubs, or trees. These snakes may also be seen in several different color phases, including sometimes even teal or blue phases, making them especially of interest to the intermediate hobbyist or enthusiast. Baron's racers can also be distinguished by their unusual projections on their snouts, which may help break up the snake's outline amongst foliage.

These snakes are primarily diurnal (active primarily during the daytime). They are also opisthoglyphous (or rear fanged), meaning it possesses a very mild venom used in order to subdue smaller prey such as smaller lizards and snakes, small birds, insects, and small rodents or other mammals. Baron's racers are a slender bodied, arboreal species of snake with a small and somewhat elongated head, and a distinctive, protruding rostral/nasal protuberance. Ground color can vary from green, to greenish brown to sometimes blue/bluish with a pattern of one to several darker longitudinal dorsal and/or lateral stripes. The belly, or ventral surface is white to yellowish in color as well.

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: Xenodontinae

Genus: *Philodryas*

Species: *Philodryas baroni**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

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

Distribution and Habitat

The Baron's Racer is a unique, arboreal to semi-arboreal species of colubrid snake indigenous to northern South America. More specifically, this species occurs from northern Argentina, to Bolivia and Paraguay. Within this range, Baron's racers occupy primarily arboreal to semi-arboreal environments, including dry to tropical savannahs, and tropical to subtropical forests and woodlands, where they may be found thermoregulating, foraging, and seeking refuge in areas of above ground branches and other vegetation.

Origin/History

Philodryas baroni Berg, 1895.

Baron's racers have been kept in herpetoculture for at least the last couple of decades, since (at least) the mid to late 1990's. Wild collected specimens were first imported from Argentina, but they would then go on to become available as captive-bred overseas in Germany and other European countries. Baron's racers would be relatively easy to keep and would be active snakes in captivity. They would become popularly bred snakes for a couple of years in herpetoculture, but now have become more difficult to find.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Baron's racers range from 5 to 10 inches as hatchlings, and about 4 ½ to 6 feet, or 54 to 72 inches as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Semi-Arboreal to Arboreal. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling Baron's racers can be housed in a 10 to 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult Baron's racers should be housed in a minimum of a 30 to 40 gallon tall terrarium or enclosure. Baron's racers 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, fine aspen shavings, orchid bark, or coconut fibers. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide additional basking, climbing, 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 Baron's racers range from 75 to 85 degrees F on the cool side and 85 to 90 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. Baron's racers require moderate to somewhat high levels of relative humidity, and should be maintained at, or within about 60 to 75%, with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, Baron's racers are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small reptiles and amphibians, small birds, bird eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, Baron's racers 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

Baron's racers are not typically an overly aggressive or defensive species, often opting to flee and/or musk and defecate when threatened. It should be noted that this species is opisthoglyphous (or rear fanged), and possesses a very mild venom/saliva used primarily to overcome smaller prey. A bite from this species can cause some mild irritation and localized pain and swelling, and as with any rear fanged colubrid, some level of caution/common sense should be exercised when handling this species, but generally Baron's racers are not and should not be considered a dangerous or medically significant species to humans. As with many snakes, however, hatchling and juveniles may be initially more nervous and defensive. They may be more likely to rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle them gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal.

****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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