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Common Kingsnakes *(Lampropeltis getula complex)*

King Sized Diversity

Common kingsnakes are medium to large sized, robustly built colubrid snakes that can vary considerably in color and pattern depending on the species and their range or distribution. Ground color can be black, brown, grayish, tan, or yellowish with speckles, blotches, bands, striping, or chain link patterns depending on the species. Kingsnakes derive their common names from their well-known habit of consuming other snake species, including indigenous venomous snakes, which they have developed immunity to, and subdue and overpower by constriction. Most of the common kingsnake species are nocturnal to crepuscular depending upon conditions, and are fairly secretive snakes, although when threatened, can rapidly vibrate their tails to create a buzzing sound similar to a rattlesnake, expel foul smelling musk, and/or attempt to bite in defense.

Species

Species include the California Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis californiae*), Florida Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis floridana*), Brook's Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis brooksi*), Eastern or Chain Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula*), Apalachicola Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis meansi*, formerly *goini*), Speckled Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis holbrooki*), Mexican Black Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis nigrata*), and Desert Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis splendida*).

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: Lampropeltis

Species: *Lampropeltis californiae**, *Lampropeltis floridana**, *Lampropeltis brooksi**, *Lampropeltis getula**, *Lampropeltis meansi**, *Lampropeltis holbrooki**, *Lampropeltis nigrata**, and *Lampropeltis splendida**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, common king snakes can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The common kingsnakes are a widespread genus of primarily terrestrial, medium sized to large, North American colubrid snakes indigenous to much of the United States, and into northern Mexico, depending upon the species and subspecies. The California kingsnake occupies the most extreme western and southwestern United States and into northwestern Mexico along the Gulf of California, while the desert kingsnake occupies areas further east in the southwestern and northern Mexico. The speckled kingsnake occupies the south-central U.S., and the eastern black kingsnake in the east-central U.S. Finally, the eastern kingsnake occupies the coastal southeastern to eastern U.S., while the Florida and Brooks kingsnakes occupy Florida and surrounding southeastern U.S. states. The Mexican black kingsnake occupies the Sonoran Desert and northwestern Sinaloa in Mexico, to small portions of the southwestern U.S.

Within this range, common kingsnakes occupy a variety of primarily terrestrial environments, depending on the species and their range. In the western half of the United States, these species may occupy semi-arid to dry open forests and woodlands, grasslands, scrublands, to semi-deserts, as well as agricultural and suburban areas, while in the eastern United States, the different species which occur can be found in deciduous to sub-tropical forests and woodlands and forest edges, pine-palmetto or scrubland forests, agricultural and suburban areas, rocky, forested hillsides, and the margins of swamplands, marshes, and other permanent to semi-permanent wetlands. Common kingsnakes are a somewhat secretive group of species, often seeking refuge in burrows, rocks and rock crevices, hollowed logs, and other natural or manmade debris on or near the ground.

Origin/History

Lampropeltis getula (Linnaeus, 1766). The *Lampropeltis getula* complex was first described by Carl Linnaeus in 1766. Subspecies would be described by other authors during other years.

Common kingsnakes have long been a staple North American colubrid species which have been present in the pet trade and herpetoculture for many decades. They were hardy, easily breed, and usually became voracious eaters in captivity, and their docile temperaments and wide array of colors and patterns made them among the most popular North American colubrids since at least the 1950's or 1960's. The California kingsnake (*californiae*), Florida, or Brooks kingsnake (*floridana*), Desert (*splendida*), and locality-specific Eastern kingsnakes (*getula*) would become the most popular of the subspecies. The California and Florida/Brook's kings especially would be bred in increasing arrays of color and pattern morphs and mutations, and also had tremendous natural phenotypic and locality variation as well. The Mexican black kingsnake (*nigrata*) would also become another popular and sought after subspecies, especially later in the 2000's.

Kingsnakes would remain popular, and perhaps would see their peak in popularity during the late 1980's and 1990's, although by the 2000's, the ball python would offset this popularity. Despite

this, these kingsnakes are still readily available in the pet trade and continue to be somewhat popular.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner.

Size

Common kingsnakes can range from 5 to 10 inches as hatchlings, and 2 to 5 feet, or 24 to 54 inches as most adults depending on the species. Some of the larger species can reach up to 6 feet, or 72 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling common kingsnakes can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult common kingsnakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Common kingsnakes 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 common king 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. Common kingsnakes should be maintained at relatively moderate relative humidity levels, which may vary somewhat depending on the species and subspecies, 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, common kingsnakes 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. Kingsnakes are well-known for overpowering and consuming other snakes species that share their ranges, including venomous species. In captivity, common kingsnakes 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 king snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your king snake gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Many king 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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