



*Photo Credit: Rikyo Kamakura

Cuban Boa (*Epicrates/Chilabothrus angulifer*)

Cool Cubans!

The Cuban Boa (*Chilabothrus angulifer*) is a somewhat slender bodied, medium-sized to large species of boa endemic to Cuba, the Bahamas, and other surrounding islands. Ground color in this species ranges from a tan or light brown to yellowish-brown to olive-brown with wide, darker brown to black dorsal blotches or irregular, zig-zag shaped patterning.

A crepuscular species, Cuban boas are also strong climbers, and will frequently ambush bats, small birds, and rodents from the entrances of caves, nests, or other roosts, where they use their heat sensitive labial pits and receptors to locate prey even in complete darkness. They are also the largest species of snakes endemic to the West Indies. While not offered nearly as often as many more popularly and commonly kept boa or python species in the herpetocultural hobby, the Cuban boa could make for a much more unique and uncommon species to maintain, so check out the latest care guide!

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: *Epicrates/Chilabothrus*

Species: *Epicrates/Chilabothrus angulifer**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Cuban boas can be expected to attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more, although up to 35 to 40 years is possible.

Distribution and Habitat

The Cuban boa is a species medium sized to large, arboreal to semi-arboreal boa indigenous primarily to Cuba, the Bahamas, and its surrounding islands. Within this range, Cuban boas occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-arboreal environments, including the dry, tropical to sub-tropical forests and woodlands, where they utilize the semi-humid leaf litter and other ground or forest floor to low canopy vegetation and debris. Cuban boas can also occur in more disturbed and degraded habitats as well, such as agricultural and residential or suburban areas near human habitations as well.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

Cuban boas are large as neonates, and can reach up to 30 to 36 inches, or around 2 ½ to 3 feet, and can reach up to 10 to 12 feet on average (120 to 144 inches). Cuban boas have been recorded up to 16 feet, or 192 inches maximum size for an exceptionally large individual.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Terrestrial to Semi-Arboreal. Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Neonate to juvenile Cuban boas can be started out in a 20 gallon long 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 mid to large sized boas and pythons. Depending on the age and size of the animal, a four to six foot by two foot enclosure or larger is required. Cuban 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. Cuban boas will also require a large sturdy water dish or tub that must be cleaned, sanitized, and changed regularly, especially if dirtied. Providing an adequately sized hidebox, artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, logs, and other cage furnishings can also provide additional hiding and basking opportunities. Cuban boas will climb if given the opportunity, but floor space is more important than height.

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 Cuban 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. 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. Cuban boas should be maintained at relatively moderate to high relative humidity levels, which may range from about 50 to 70%, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, Cuban 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, Cuban boas can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. 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

As with many snakes, young and juvenile Cuban boas can initially be nervous and defensive. They may be more prone to act defensively by coiling and striking if they feel threatened or defensive. Handle your Cuban boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Cuban boas are a species that has held a negative reputation for being defensive and quick to strike, although their temperaments and dispositions can depend upon the individual animal. Some can become relatively docile with time and will tolerate handling, although others can remain prone to musking and/or striking. This is a species that requires previous knowledge and experience with mid-sized, and sometimes semi-defensive to defensive boids.

****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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