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Dwarf Locality “Boa Constrictors” (*Boa imperator*) and (*Boa spp.*)

Smaller, and Underrated Boa Constrictors

“Dwarf” localities of Boa constrictors consist of several different “races”, or “localities” of Boa constrictors found in Mexico, Central, and South America. They are among some of the most northern-ranging boa constrictors within their range, with some occurring in the relatively higher elevation, cooler montane regions of northern Mexico, as well as elsewhere in Central and South America. But what exactly is a “dwarf” boa constrictor? These boas, in most cases, are not their own species or subspecies, but are rather smaller forms of most often the Common or Central American Boa (*Boa imperator*) which have evolved their smaller sizes whether due to the areas in which they occur with relatively cooler or higher altitude climates, and/or a more limited availability of prey sources or other resources. As a result, many of these boas may only reach about 3 ½ to 5 ½ feet as adults. Many of these localities have also evolved with much darker coloration as an adaptation for these environments in which they occur. Aside from their smaller adult sizes, and therefore smaller enclosure requirements, the overall care and husbandry for these dwarf localities remains similar to other, larger Boa constrictors, and much of the following information also remains pertinent.

“Boa constrictors”, commonly and collectively speaking, are generally medium sized to large, terrestrial to semi-arboreal species of boas widely distributed in Central and South America. They can be quite variable in coloration, appearance, and size depending on any of the twelve or more species, subspecies, and localities within their wide range. Depending on these factors, these snakes are heavy bodied tan, light to dark brown, yellowish, to cream colored snakes with dark brown to reddish brown “bow tie” shaped dorsal and lateral blotches, a dark ocular stripe running behind each of the eyes, and red to reddish orange or brownish blotches towards the tail. “Boa constrictors” as a species are habitat generalists, and can be found in many different environments from semi-arboreal to terrestrial environments, although adults of most species become larger and heavier bodied.

In the pet trade, many specimens are known as “red tailed” boas; however, the majority of these are actually the common boas *Boa imperator* (BI), and not true “red tails”, *Boa constrictor* (BC). “Boa constrictors” are a staple “large snake” species in the pet trade, and can make for excellent and docile pets with the right level of knowledge, experience, and foresight without reaching overly large and unmanageable sizes that some other species do. When it comes to the dwarf locality boas, these animals remain even smaller as adults, giving them much of the similar size and care requirements as many other smaller species of boas and pythons such as ball pythons, and even many colubrids such as kingsnakes, ratsnakes, and milksnakes. This care guide document will cover the different localities of dwarf boa constrictors found in Mexico, Central, and South America, where each one occurs or is found, and their overall care and

husbandry required.

Origin-History: *Boa imperator* Daudin, 1803; *Boa sigma* (Smith, 1943); *Boa imperator sabogae* (Barbour, 1906).

The origins and history of the dwarf locality *Boa* constrictors in herpetoculture is not well explored. Prior to 2016, these localities were largely regarded as conspecifics, or the same species as “*Boa imperator*” or “*Boa constrictor* ssp.”. These animals were likely kept and imported in smaller numbers well prior to 2016, but were historically not well distinguished or identified from the mainland “Common” or “Red-tailed” *Boa* constrictors until in more recent decades. “*Boa sigma*” was elevated to its own species in 2016 after genetic study; however, there is still some level of uncertainty, and further research into these races of *Boa constrictor* may still be warranted. Additional species of *Boa* spp. may possibly exist with these localities.

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: *Boa*

Species: *Boa imperator**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

The Dwarf Boa “Constrictor” Species and Localities; Ranges and Habitats



****Crawl Cay Boa Constrictor (*Boa imperator*). Photo Credit: Boa-constrictor.com***

A light to darkish ashy grayish, silvery, to whitish locality with dark speckling or mottling on the head and along the body. This is also another moderately sized locality, reaching about 5 feet in length. Crawl Cay boas originate from “Crawl Cay” of the east coast of Belize, as their name implies.



***Caulker Cay Boa Constrictor (*Boa imperator*).** Photo Credit: Darren Hamill

Reptiles.

A light to darkish, ashy grayish, silvery, to whitish locality with dark, bold brown or black blotches and saddling. Less speckling or mottling than Crawl Cay Boas, and also has thick, dark post-ocular stripes behind the eyes. This is also another small to moderately sized locality, reaching about 4 to 5 feet in length, and are one of the smallest of the insular *Boa imperator* localities. Caulker Cay boas originate from Caye Caulker, off the coast of Belize, as their name implies.



***Hog Island Boa Constrictor (*Boa imperator*).** Photo Credit: Island Boas.

A naturally hypomelanistic, light to pale locality ranging from pinkish, to white, greenish, pale ashy-gray, or yellowish, with pale reddish, yellowish, to orangish blotches and saddles towards the tail. While not a “dwarf” locality of boa constrictor, Hog Island boas are still a relatively smaller, “mid-sized” Boa, reaching about 5 to 6 feet, or sometimes 7 feet.



***Corn Island/Nicaraguan Boa Constrictor (*Boa imperator*).** Photo Credit: Ball-Pythons.Net user TheWinWizard.

A dark colored locality ranging from dark brown, blackish, to dark reddish brown with muted or dirty “reddish” or “orangish” hue with dark crimson red tail blotches and saddles. Some morphs also available. This is a smaller locality of Boa, most often reaching 4 to 5 feet. Nicaraguan boas range from southern Mexico to northwest Colombia of South America. Corn Island boas, as their name implies, are found from the so-called “corn islands” of the Isla del Maíz Grande (about 6 sq km) and the Isla del Maíz Pequena (about 1.5 sq km).



***Sonoran Boa Constrictor (*Boa imperator*).** Photo Credit: Selectivebred.com. A

somewhat light colored to very dark locality of *Boa constrictor* ranging from light to dark tan or brown, to very dark, chocolate brown to black with darker, contrasting dorsal blotches and saddles, with lighter cream or yellow borders. The tail, and blotches and saddles towards the tail are typically very dark, and can be a dark crimson red. This is a highly variable and beautiful boa locality. This is also another dwarf Locality, reaching only 2 to 4 feet. Sonoran desert boas, or "Sonoran" boas occur in Northwestern Mexico And Northern Central America localities bordering the Sonoran Desert.



***Paraguana Boa Constrictor (*Boa imperator*).** Photo Credit: Cutting Edge Herpetological, Inc. This locality of *Boa constrictor* is said to be a transitional form between BCI and BCC in the Paraguayan Peninsula of northwestern Venezuela in South America. The head shape is relatively shorter, and the overall pattern, coloration, and contrast is remnant of those of BCC, with thick, bold dorsal saddles. This species is considered a semi-dwarf locality, reaching about 4 to 6 feet. Paraguana boas are available in the pet trade, but not frequently.



***Tarahumara Mountain Boa Constrictor (*Boa imperator/Boa sigma*).**

Photo Credit: Ball-Pythons.Net user Chip07. A light to darkish, ashy grayish, silvery, to whitish locality with dark, bold brown or black blotches and saddling, and also has thick, dark post-ocular stripes behind the eyes and spearpoint on the head. Dorsal blotches or saddles sometimes connected, giving a "chainlink" pattern. The Tarahumara boa is perhaps the smallest and most northern-ranging of the dwarf boa constrictors, occurring in the Tarahumara mountain ranges of Chihuahua and Sonora Mexico in northern Mexico, as this locality's name implies. *Dwarf Locality reaching only 3 1/2 to 4 1/2 feet.



***Cancun Boa Constrictor (*Boa imperator*).** Photo Credit: Boa-constrictors.com. A light to moderately colored species of Boa, ranging from a golden or golden-brown in ground color, and darker brown bold and contrasting dorsal blotches and saddles. Post-ocular stripes behind the eyes are also thick and bold, and the light colored tail blotches are often overlapping and connected, forming a “chain-link” or “zigzag” pattern. The head is otherwise light colored. Cancun boas are another small to moderately sized Boa locality, reaching about 4 to 5 feet. Cancun boas, as their name implies, originate from, and around the Mexican city of Cancun of Quintana Roo.



***Pearl Island Boa Constrictor (*Boa sabogae*).** Photo Credit: Tierra de Morelia.

Pearl Island Boa Constrictor (*Boa sabogae*)*Also in Main Boa Constrictor Care Guide.

Pearl Island Boas, as their common names may imply, are a Boa constrictor species indigenous to the Pearl Islands, as well as the nearby islands of Cha Mar, Tobago, and Taboguila of the Panama coast. A relatively light colored species, Pearl Island boas can vary in color from a light beige or brown, to pinkish or light reddish or yellowish, with hypomelanistic, and some other morphs having been found in the wild as well. This species can further be identified by their muted, or reduced, incomplete dorsal blotches or saddles, oftentimes with brighter orange or reddish coloration. The head is comparatively lighter colored compared to the rest of the body, and a darker stripe, as well as post ocular stripes, are present on the head. Pearl Island boas are quite imperiled in the wild, and it is uncertain as to whether remaining populations exist, due to habitat loss and destruction, as well as outright persecution. However, they breed well in captivity and are somewhat available in the pet industry. This is a comparatively smaller species of Boa constrictor as well, typically reaching about 4 to 6 feet in length.



El Salvador Boa Constrictor (Boa imperator). Photo Credit: <http://boa-c-constrictor.de/>

El Salvador Boa Constrictor (Boa imperator): El Salvador boas are another locality of very small "dwarf" boas occurring within the transitional zones of El Salvador, where tropical evergreen rainforest transitions to savannahs or grasslands. These small boas also tend to be very dark in color, with a dark grayish-brown or reddish-brown ground color with variable amounts of saddles, ranging from 28 or more. The tails and necks can also be a rusty coloration as well. This locality seldom exceeds about 4 1/2 to 5 feet in length, and are very hardy and robust boas to maintain in captivity.



Tamaulipas Boa Constrictor (Boa imperator). Photo Credit: Herpetoculture Magazine.

Tamaulipas Boa Constrictor (Boa imperator): Very similar to the Tarahumara Mountain Boas (Boa sigma/imperator). The Tamaulipas boa, sometimes also known as the Tamaulipas Cloud Forest boa, is another locality of small, very dark Mexican locality of dwarf boas occurring from around Tamaulipas in the northeastern state of Mexico. These boas range in color from a grayish with rusty brown saddles and markings, and as they become older, can develop a much deeper reddish, brown, or copper coloration. This "browner" coloration often contrasts with their more grayish coloration as neonates. Tamaulipas boas are another very small locality, seldom exceeding 4 1/2 to 5 feet, and can also be very robust boa localities in captivity.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, "Boa constrictors" can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more, although up to 35 to 40 years is also not uncommon.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Most of the dwarf locality Boa constrictors range from about 8 to 12 inches as neonates, and approximately 3 1/2 to 5 feet or 42 to 60 inches as adults, although this can depend on the locality.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Arboreal. Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Neonate to juvenile dwarf 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. Most of the relatively smaller to mid-sized dwarf boa constrictor localities can be housed comfortably within a number of the commercially made plastic or fiberglass enclosures, or otherwise custom-designed enclosures that can retain heat and humidity well. Depending on the age and size of the animal, a roughly 40 gallon enclosure, 30 inch by 24 inch enclosure, or similar type of enclosure is suggested. Dwarf 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. 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. 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 “Boa constrictors” 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. Boa constrictors should be maintained at relatively moderate to somewhat high relative humidity levels, which may range from about 50 to 70%, which can vary with the species, subspecies, and locality, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, “Boa constrictors” are carnivorous, and will prey upon a wide range of small to large mammals, birds, and other reptiles that they can ambush and consume. In captivity, Dwarf “Boa constrictors” 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 boas are often initially more nervous and defensive. Young boas may gape and

hiss, and attempt to bite what they perceive to be a threat or a predator. Handle your boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most boas are docile and will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older. The dwarf locality boa constrictors can vary in their temperaments or dispositions, depending on the locality.

Many of these boas, as with most snakes, can be more “hissy” or defensive as babies or neonates, but can calm down and become more accustomed to handling as adults. Some localities can be more nervous, or at least flightier and faster moving, than others, although this again depends on each specific locality. For the first time boa or other reptile keeper, some of these dwarf boas may still not necessarily make the best choice in a pet when it comes to their handling, despite their small sizes, and so research into each of the localities is suggested.

****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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