



**Photo Credit: Reptile Range*

Emerald Tree Boa (*Corallus caninus*) and (*Corallus batesii*)

Classic Icon of the Amazonian Rainforest

Emerald tree boas are a medium sized boa species with an adult coloration typically of a bright emerald green with a series of white, irregular dorsal zigzag pattern, and a paler yellow ventral surface. Newborn emerald tree boas undergo a noticeable ontogenetic color change from the time they are newborns or juveniles to adults, and can be bright red, reddish orange, to reddish brown in color. Newborn and juvenile emerald tree boas are not yellow as are hatchling to young green tree pythons (*Morelia viridis*). In fact, emerald tree boas are strongly believed to have evolved convergent to the green tree python, which are an unrelated species found in a separate area of the world despite having similar appearances, lifestyles, and natural history. Emerald tree boas are a strongly arboreal species of boa, very seldom descending to the ground, and have several physical and physiological features for adapted life in trees including a highly prehensile tail, and a more triangular bodily cross section characteristic of many arboreal snakes. Furthermore, an Amazon Basin Emerald Tree Boa, *Corallus batesii*, has been recognized as a distinct enough species, and differs from *C. caninus* by the shape and number of scales across the rostrum, and its larger size. Emerald tree boas are a holy grail of nearly any intermediate to advanced herp enthusiast, and their well-known and iconic image as a tropical animal leads to these species making excellent display or center-piece specimens overall.

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: *Corallus*

Species: *Corallus caninus** and *Corallus batesii**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

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

Distribution and Habitat

Emerald tree boas are a species of medium sized, arboreal boas indigenous to the Amazonian region of northern South America. More specifically, this iconic species occurs from Guyana, to Suriname, French Guiana, Colombia, eastern and southern Venezuela, and northeastern Brazil, where they occur north of Rio Amazonas, and north and east of the Rio Negro regions. Within this range, Emerald Tree Boas occupy primarily arboreal environments, including heavily forested, tropical to sub-tropical rainforests and other lowland tropical forests and woodlands, as well as forested swamplands, wetlands, and river basins. Emerald tree boas prefer relatively pristine and undisturbed habitats and environments, where they occupy the tree branches, hollows, cavities, and dense vegetation and foliage of the lower to mid-canopy level above the ground, where they seldom venture.

Origin/History

Corallus caninus (Linnaeus, 1758); *Corallus batesii* (Gray, 1860).

It is difficult to determine when exactly the striking Emerald tree boa was first kept, bred, and imported, although they have been available in the pet trade for many decades since at least the 1960's or 1970's. They would quickly become popular and iconic boa species, but were certainly not for beginning reptile enthusiasts, as most specimens, at least initially, were wild-collected and had high parasite loads. Now, however, captive breeding and availability of these beautiful boas has become more successful and commonplace.

There would actually be two species of Emerald tree boas described, the Northern (*C. caninus*) and the Amazon Basin (*C. batesii*). The latter southern species would oftentimes be the more coveted of the two Emerald tree boa species, and would generally have better reported dispositions than the northern species or race.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

Emerald tree boas range from about 8 to 10 inches as neonates. As adults, Emerald tree boas are typically about 4 to 6 ½ feet in length, or 48 to about 78 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Arboreal. Housing must be sealed, well ventilated, and escape proof. Neonate to juvenile emerald tree boas can be started out in a 10 to 15 gallon tall 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 these specialized, mid-sized boas. Depending on the age and size of the animal, a 20 to 40 gallon tall enclosure is required. Emerald tree 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. Provide a water bowl at the bottom of the enclosure, and ample horizontal branches, vines, rocks, logs, and/or perches about the same width as the animal's body for climbing, basking, and hiding opportunities. Emerald tree boas are a strongly arboreal

species, and enclosure height is more important than floor space.

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 Emerald tree 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. Regular misting is also beneficial for this species, which should be maintained at high relative humidity levels of 65 to 75% humidity, with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health. 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.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, emerald tree 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, emerald tree boas can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Some emerald tree boas may initially prefer lizards or frogs, however. 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

Newborn emerald tree boas have a delicate skeletal structure, and must be handled sparingly to prevent accidental injury to the animal. These boas have a negative reputation for being mean or nasty; however, this notion is slowly changing as more animals are becoming captive born. This is a species that often responds well to calm and deliberate handling by removing the perch from the enclosure with the animal first, and then allowing it to voluntarily move from perch to hands from underneath. Forcing the animal from its enclosure will cause injury and/or further stress to the animal. Newly acquired ETBs should also be allowed to acclimate before any handling is attempted, especially if they are wild caught or farmed animals. While some emerald tree boas can be handled for short periods of time in this manner, they are a species that, in general, are

still less readily handle able than a ball python or Boa constrictor, for example.

****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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