



*Photo Credit: Rex Knight

Hundred Flower Ratsnake (*Orthriophis/Elaphe moellendorffi*)

Quite Possibly the Most Beautiful Ratsnake

Also known as the Mollendorff's Ratsnake, or Red Headed Ratsnake, the Hundred Flower Ratsnake is a relatively large, old world semi-arboreal ratsnake species currently known from only southeastern China and northern Vietnam. As with most other old world ratsnakes, hundred flower ratsnakes are strong and agile climbers, often seeking refuge in, or searching for smaller prey among trees, limestone caves and caverns, and bushes or shrubs. A striking and beautiful species, the hundred flower ratsnake exhibits a wide variety of colors and patterns consisting of a tan or light brown, gray or silverish, to light greenish-gray ground color with a series of large, darker alternating dorsal and lateral reddish, reddish-brown, to black blotches. The head and neck, as well as portions of the tail are vibrantly colored reddish to reddish-orange. Relatively little more in the way of natural history and observations are currently known about this species, although it is increasing in popularity within the herpetoculture hobby as a beautiful, stunning species perhaps best suited for the more intermediate to advanced enthusiast.

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: *Orthriophis/Elaphe*

Species: *Orthriophis/Elaphe moellendorffi**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the correct care and husbandry, hundred flower ratsnakes have the potential to achieve longevity of up to 15 to 25 years or slightly more.

Distribution and Habitat

Hundred flower ratsnakes are a unique species of large, Old World ratsnake species currently

known only from southeastern China and northern Vietnam. Within this range, this hundred flower ratsnakes are arboreal to semi-arboreal species which are most often observed within and near limestone caves and caverns, rocky hillsides, and thick bamboo thickets, as well as riverside brush and shrubs, where it is normally seldom encountered.

Origin/History

Elaphe moellendorffi (Boettger, 1886).

The hundred flower ratsnake has historically been a species which has been plagued by the reputation of being difficult and sensitive species to keep. They would be prone to heavy parasite loads and dehydration. They would also be temperature-sensitive species in addition. These factors however, would be based largely on wild-collected and imported specimens. However, once their care and husbandry parameters would become better known and understood by reptile keepers, these ratsnakes would be able to be more successfully kept and bred in captivity.

It is uncertain as to when *moellendorffi*, as well as many of the Asian *Elaphe*, or ratsnake species first were kept or entered the herpetocultural industry, although they have probably been kept for many decades, with wild-collected and imported animals being much more the norm in earlier decades of herpetoculture (1950' through 1970's). Now, however, captive-breeding has increased in more recent decades once their care and husbandry parameters and requirements became better known and understood.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

Hundred flower ratsnakes can range from 10 to 15 inches as hatchlings, and up to 5 to 8 feet, or 54 to 96 inches as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Semi-Arboreal to Arboreal. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling and juvenile hundred flower ratsnakes can be housed in a 20 to 40 gallon long or tall terrarium or enclosure. Adult hundred flower ratsnakes require large enclosures, and should be housed in a minimum of a 55 to 75 gallon tall or long terrarium or enclosure or larger. These ratsnakes 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, orchid bark, 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, 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. Hundred flower ratsnakes prefer cooler temperatures than many other snakes. Ideal temperatures for these ratsnakes should range from 70 to 77 degrees F on the ambient and cool side and 78 to 80 degrees F on the warm and basking side. Relative humidity should be maintained for this species at 50 to 60%, and dry and humid basking areas, as well as humid hides or retreats lined with sphagnum moss or other substrates which retain humidity well should be provided. Providing this added humidity can assist with shedding and overall health. Regular misting can also help maintain the hydration and humidity this species requires. 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.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, hundred flower ratsnakes 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. In captivity, these ratsnakes 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 hundred flower rat snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle them gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. There is variability in temperaments among individuals of this species. Some can become very docile and tolerant of regular handling, while others may remain remaining nervous and defensive snakes. Captive bred specimens will often become more acclimated and handleable than wild caught individuals.

****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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