



*Photo Credit: Noel Thomas

Kukuri Snakes (*Oligodon* spp.)

Another Kind of Egg Eater!

Kukuri snakes are a genus of relatively small, nocturnal to crepuscular colubrid snakes consisting of approximately 80 species in total indigenous to tropical and sub-tropical, humid southern and southeastern Asia. These small, relatively short and heavy bodied snakes have quite indistinct necks from their heads, and can be tremendously variable in their coloration and patterning depending upon the species. Ground color for snakes in this genus can vary from light to dark brownish, yellowish-brown, olive or olive-brown, to grayish, orangish, reddish or reddish-orange, to reddish-brown. Many species also possess a series of lighter to darker blackish or dark brown, to lighter yellowish, cream colored, or dark reddish, banding, or rings along their bodies. Some species and individuals can also be longitudinally striped as well. Kukuri snakes are also a rear-fanged, or opisthoglyphous genus of snakes, using their enlarged rear-ward facing teeth and Duvernoy's Glands comprising of a mild venom to consume and overcome their preferred prey of bird and reptile eggs, as well as smaller amphibians, lizards, and smaller mammals. In fact, the name "kukori" is derived from their distinctive tooth structure similar in shape to Nepalese knives. While still quite an uncommonly kept and bred genera in the United States, Kukuri snakes can make for very colorful, and unique species of snakes to keep for just about any intermediate level enthusiast able to locate and keep these oddball little egg eaters!

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

Genus: *Oligodon*

Species: *Oligodon* spp.*

*Perhaps the most commonly available species; Brown, or Purple Kukuri (*Oligodon purpurascens*)

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Kukuri snakes are hardy snakes that can attain potential longevity of at least 10 to 15 years or more. Other than their somewhat specialized dietary requirements, kukuri snakes for the most part have similar care and husbandry requirements as other many other small colubrid species found in the pet trade.

Distribution and Habitat

Kukuri snakes belong to a large genera of approximately 80 species occurring over much of southern to southeastern Asia, with range depending upon the exact species. Depending on the species, members in this genus may occur in much of India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, to Myanmar, Vietnam, China, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Additional species in this genus also occur in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Thailand, Cambodia, South Laos, and Indonesia. Kukuri snakes are secretive, semi-fossorial snakes which will utilize semi-moist, humid mammal and other small animal burrows, forest floor leaf litter and other ground debris in mature tropical forests to agricultural areas and plantations near human habitations.

Origin/History

Oligodon spp. Fitzinger, 1826. Specific species of kukuri snakes would have other authors first describing them during other years.

Unfortunately, very little information is available into the history of kukuri snakes for the pet trade or herpetoculture, as it is lacking.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Kukuri snakes are a relatively small, heavy bodied species, with adult sizes varying somewhat upon the exact species. Adults of most species, however, typically seldom exceed much more than perhaps 2 to 3 feet (or about 24 to 36 inches). Hatchlings and juveniles range from about 4 to 9 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Terrestrial to Semi-Fossorial. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling and juvenile kukuri snakes can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult kukuri snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 15 to 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Kukuri snakes are primarily terrestrial, but appreciate ample burrowing opportunities. Floor space is more important than height. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding that maintains humidity moderately well such as cypress mulch, or coconut fibers or other tropical bark substrates. These snakes can also benefit from additional potting soil or sphagnum moss, substrates as well. 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, cork bark, 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 kukuri snakes range from 75 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and 80 to 90 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. Kukuri snakes require moderate levels of relative humidity, at, or between 40 and 60%, which may vary somewhat depending on the species, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, kukuri snakes are specialist egg eating species, oftentimes using their specialized rear-ward teeth for consuming and ingesting small bird and reptile eggs. Other prey items that may be consumed by these snakes can include small lizards and other smaller reptiles and amphibians, large invertebrates, and small rodents, or other small mammals. In captivity, these snakes can be provided commercially available eggs from pigeons, Coturnix quail, doves, button quail, or finches depending on the age and size of the snake. Most kukuri snakes are not large enough to consume standard chicken eggs. Generally, Coturnix quail eggs are the easiest to obtain, and can be inexpensively purchased from any Asian or local ethnic food stores, agricultural feed stores, or local bird breeders in one's area. Smaller eggs, such as those from button quail and finches can be used for smaller snakes. These may be less readily available to obtain, but can still be located through local pet stores, bird breeders, or other similar sources. Alternatively, these eggs can be ordered online if local sources for these eggs are unavailable. Other prey items which can be accepted by these snakes include designated feeder frogs or lizards, or appropriately sized pre-killed rodents, which these species can become acclimated to eat. These snakes can be fed once to twice weekly using appropriately sized eggs or other food items, and any uneaten eggs, and regurgitated shells should be cleaned and removed periodically. Most of these eggs can also be refrigerated, and kukuri snakes do not require any additional dietary supplementation as a result of their specialized diets. 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

Kukuri snakes are still infrequently bred in captivity, and information on the temperament and dispositions of hatchlings and juveniles is sparse. However, as with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile snakes typically are initially be nervous and defensive. When threatened, these snakes may thrash their bodies and potentially attempt to bite while emitting a noxious smelling musk and feces. Captive bred and born kukuri snakes can become more calm and acclimated to being handled, and their surroundings over time, but are also a rear-fanged genus. While not considered medically significant to humans, bites from this genus have been reported to have caused excessive blood clotting due to anticoagulants in their Duvernoy's Glands. Therefore, at least some level of care should be taken while handling this genus.

****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

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