



\*Photo Credit: Vivid Reptiles

## Mandarin Rat Snake (*Elaphe/Euprepiophis mandarinus*)

---

### **Mandarin Beauties**

The Mandarin ratsnake is a relatively small to medium sized old world rat snake species indigenous to eastern Asia. More specifically, this beautiful species occurs from India, to northern Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Taiwan, to southern China. They are a fairly slender bodied species, with a ground color of grayish to tan, light brown, or pinkish with a series of boldly colored black and yellow dorsal bands, triangular markings, or diamonds on the dorsum. The head is typically black or dark colored with a series of brighter yellow or white crosses and markings present. This species is indigenous to the cooler climates within their range, and are oftentimes a shy, crepuscular, and secretive species, preferring to burrow or remain hidden or unseen. As such, this beautiful and sought after species can make for very satisfying pet snakes for the more intermediate level enthusiast seeking a more unique and less common species! The beauty of the Mandarin ratsnake is hard to beat, and may just be that next snake, while also having relatively easily met and straightforward care requirements 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:** Colubridae

**Subfamily:** Colubrinae

**Genus:** *Elaphe/Euprepiophis*

**Species:** *Elaphe/Euprepiophis mandarinus*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, mandarin ratsnakes can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

The Mandarin ratsnake is a relatively medium sized to large, secretive species of Old World

ratsnake indigenous to southern to eastern Asia. More specifically, this beautiful species occurs from India, to northern Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Taiwan, to southern China. Within this range, Mandarin ratsnakes occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-arboreal environments, including tropical to sub-tropical forests and woodlands, as well as grasslands and shrublands, where these secretive species seek refuge in burrows, rocks and rock crevices, hollowed logs, and other areas of low or ground debris and vegetation.

### **Origin/History**

*Euprepophis mandarinus* (Cantor, 1842).

Although an exact timeline as to when Mandarin ratsnakes first entered herpetoculture, these snakes would be relatively uncommon in the hobby, and would not usually be carried by pet stores, but specimens could be obtained online. Wild collected specimens are regularly imported, but they tend to be stressed from the capture, be more finicky in their eating habits, and have parasites. The husbandry and care parameters for Mandarin ratsnakes proved to be different from those of many other snakes, which led up to their reputation for being difficult to keep. However, the successful captive breeding of these snakes is becoming much more common and captive bred individuals are usually now available every year.

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Mandarin ratsnakes range from 5 to 12 inches as hatchlings, and 3 to 4 ½ feet, or 36 to 54 inches as most adults.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Fossorial.*** Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling mandarin rat snakes can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult mandarin rat snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 30 gallon long terrarium or enclosure or similar sized enclosure. These secretive rat snakes will do best on a substrate that enables them to burrow and hide, and can include fine aspen shavings, coconut fibers, sphagnum fir mixtures, or cypress mulch. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide a fresh water bowl or dish and a hide box at all times in the enclosure. Artificial foliage, driftwood, and other cage furnishings can provide additional hiding and basking opportunities. Maintain mandarin rat snakes at moderate humidity levels as well. Too much or too little ventilation or inadequate humidity can lead to respiratory infections, blisters, and/or other health related issues in this species. For maintaining adequate humidity, a humid hide box can be provided lined with a substrate that retains humidity well, such as sphagnum moss. Mandarin rat snakes will climb if given the opportunity, but are mainly terrestrial, and 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 under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter. Mandarin rat snakes are endemic to cooler climates, and husbandry should reflect this. Ideal temperatures for mandarin rat snakes can range from a gradient of 60 to 80 degrees F, with temperatures not to exceed 85 degrees F for prolonged periods of time. Mandarin rat snakes will typically do well at simply room temperature of 70 to 75 degrees F. UVA/UVB lighting, although not required for most snakes, can greatly benefit their overall health and well-being. 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. Mandarin ratsnakes require moderate levels of relative humidity, which should be at, or within about 60 to 75%, with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Carnivorous;*** In the wild, mandarin 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, mandarin 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**

Mandarin rat snakes are generally a shy and reclusive species. As with many snakes, hatchling and juveniles especially may oftentimes initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Adults can often become calmer and less prone to biting, but still can be somewhat nervous and flighty snakes to handle. Handle these snakes of any age or size gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal.

**\*\*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**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:

[Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com](mailto:Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com)

*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 prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. We cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety.*

\*Copyright, 2023