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## Mountain Kingsnakes (*Lampropeltis zonata* ssp.) and (*Lampropeltis pyromelana* ssp.)

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### Pioneers of Herpetoculture

Mountain kingsnakes are a collective group of two small to medium sized kingsnake species consisting of approximately 10 subspecies. Most of the Arizona and California Mountain kingsnake species are tri colored species, with numerous red, black and yellowish to white bands present throughout the body. Some subspecies or specimens may become darker or have greater amounts of dark melanin as they become older, and most species also have a dark patch atop their heads and a lighter band around their napes (or necks). Kingsnakes derive their common names from their well-known habit of consuming other snake species, including indigenous venomous snakes. Early captive keeping and breeding of the mountain kingsnake species has pioneered much of the further developments being seen in pet keeping and herpetoculture.

### 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:** *Lampropeltis*

**Species:** *Lampropeltis zonata*\* and *Lampropeltis pyromelana*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, mountain king snakes can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

### Species

The California Mountain Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis zonata*) consists of seven (7) subspecies including: Todos Santos Island Kingsnake (*L. z. herrerae*), San Pedro Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z. agalma*), Saint Helena Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z. zonata*), Coastal Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z.*

*multifasciata*), Sierra Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z. multicincta*), San Diego Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z. pulchra*), and San Bernardino Mountain Kingsnake (*L. z. parvirubra*).

The Arizona Mountain Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis pyromelana*) consists of about three (3) subspecies including the Utah Mountain Kingsnake (*L. p. infralabialis*), Sonoran Mountain Kingsnake (*L. p. knoblochi*), and nominate subspecies, the Arizona Mountain Kingsnake (*L. p. pyromelana*).

### **Distribution and Habitat**

The California and Arizona mountain kingsnakes are a group of colorful, medium sized to large, terrestrial colubrids indigenous to discontinuous portions of the western United States and into northwestern Mexico. More precise ranges and localities depend upon the exact subspecies of these colorful kingsnakes. The Arizona Mountain Kingsnake has a discontinuous range within the montane regions of the state of Arizona, while the California Mountain Kingsnake ranges from the western-most coastal and montane regions from southwestern Oregon, west-coast of California, and to northwestern Mexico. Within this range, these species of mountain kingsnakes occupy primarily terrestrial environments, including montane forests, dry, coniferous forests and woodlands, to mixed deciduous-coniferous forests, riparian woodlands, chaparrals, and coastal scrublands to semi-arid deserts. Mountain kingsnakes are a somewhat secretive group of species, often seeking refuge in burrows, rocks and rock crevices, hollowed logs, and other natural or manmade debris on or near the ground.

### **Origin/History**

*Lampropeltis zonata* (Lockington, 1876 ex Blainville, 1835); *Lampropeltis pyromelana* (Cope, 1866). Subspecies would have other authors and years attributed to them when first described.

The Mountain kingsnake (or “zonata”), the California Mountain Kingsnake, and (“pyro”), the Arizona Mountain Kingsnake complex have long been a solid and popular group of North American colubrid snakes since the 1980’s and 1990’s. Zonata have earned a strong following of locality keepers during these decades, and these snakes were relatively hardy and easily kept and bred in captivity. Their tri-colored appearances and docile temperaments made them beautiful and sought after. Many more detailed and in depth books, publications, and online websites were published specifically pertaining to “Zonata”, and information about their localities.

They were among the earliest North American colubrids to gain a strong foothold in U.S. herpetoculture by the mid to late 1990’s, and inspired well known herpetocultural classifieds and forums websites such as kingsnake.com and others since 1997. These snakes likely rivaled the corn snake (*Pantherophis guttatus*) and the gray banded kingsnake (*Lampropeltis alterna*) among North American colubrids in their pioneering much of herpetoculture to come.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Mountain kingsnakes range from about 5 to 8 inches as hatchlings, and 2 to 4 ½ feet, or 24 to 54 inches as most adults.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial.*** Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling mountain kingsnakes can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult mountain kingsnakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20 to 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Mountain kingsnakes are primarily terrestrial, and floor space is more important than height. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding such as fine aspen shavings,

cypress mulch, 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, driftwood, 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 mountain kingsnakes range from 75 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and 80 to 88 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. Mountain kingsnakes should be maintained at relatively moderate relative humidity levels, which may vary somewhat depending on the species and subspecies, from about 40 to 60%, with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

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

***Carnivorous*** ; In the wild, mountain kingsnakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird's eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. Mountain kingsnakes also sometimes known for overpowering and consuming other snakes species that share their ranges, including venomous species. In captivity, mountain kingsnakes 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 king snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your king snake gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most adult mountain kingsnakes are docile in temperament and can be readily tamed and handled with regular handling and interaction.

**\*\*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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