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*Photo Credit: Boris Klusmeyer

Red Mountain Ratsnakes (*Oreocryptophis porphyracea* ssp.)

Red Bamboo Beauties

The Red Bamboo Ratsnake (*Oreocryptophis porphyraceus*), which also goes by several other common names including the Red, or Red Banded Trinket snake and Red Mountain Ratsnake, is a relatively small, secretive Old World species of ratsnake which may be found from southern and southeastern Asia, through to Indonesia. They are a monotypic genus, with only one species presently recognized; however, several different subspecies are also currently recognized. Both banded and striped subspecies and localities are seen.

These stunning snakes may occupy tropical evergreen forests or seasonally dry and wet montaine forests, where they are secretive, semi-fossorial snakes, hiding underneath leaf litter, moss, or downed rocks or logs. These beautiful Old World colubrid snakes are also fairly easy to maintain in captivity, usually feeding readily on rodents.

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: *Oreocryptophis*

Species: *Oreocryptophis porphyracea**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

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

Distribution and Habitat

This species is indigenous to the mid to high elevation tropical to dry seasonal forests and woodlands of southeastern Asia, where they are found in the moss, leaf litter, and under rocks, logs, and other debris. Their exact range depending on the subspecies, but generally encompasses

all or portions of India, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, to Indonesia, Malaysia, Sumatra, and China.

Origin/History

Oreocryptophis porphyraceus (Cantor, 1839).

The bamboo rat snakes and their relatives are being produced in captivity in increasing numbers in recent decades. Imported, wild-caught specimens usually come into the U.S. in poor health and have tended to do poorly in captivity. It was therefore widely advised for enthusiasts to avoid field-collected imports. Captive-bred bamboo rat snakes, however, once well started in captivity, proved to be beautiful, pleasant and long-term pets. These snake's colors are stunning, and with captive-bred specimens usually becoming very docile, while remaining at a reasonable size and would be relatively easy to care for.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Red mountain ratsnakes range from 5 to 8 inches as hatchlings, and 2 ½ to 3 ½ feet in length for most adults, or about 30 to 40 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Fossorial. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling red mountain rat snakes can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult red mountain 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 aspen or fine aspen shavings, coconut fibers, orchid bark, 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 red mountain rat snakes at moderate to higher humidity levels, but still allow for drier areas for them to access. 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 minimum of two humid hide boxes should be provided lined with a substrate that retains humidity well, such as sphagnum moss. Red mountain ratsnakes are a semi-arboreal species, and will climb and can be given some opportunities to do so, but generally, floor space is more important than height with this species.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

These snakes originate from relatively cooler mid to higher altitude climates within their natural ranges, and husbandry and temperatures should replicate these conditions closely. 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. These snakes are endemic to cooler climates, and husbandry should reflect this. Ideal temperatures for red mountain rat snakes should range from a gradient of 60 to 80 degrees F, with temperatures not to exceed 82 degrees F for prolonged periods of time. Red mountain rat snakes will typically do well at simply room temperature of 70 to 75 degrees F. They, as with most snakes, do not require UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it can be greatly beneficial for their overall health and well-being. Also 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. Red mountain ratsnakes should be maintained at moderate to somewhat high relative humidity levels from 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, red mountain ratsnakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird eggs, smaller amphibians and reptiles, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, red mountain ratsnakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice, although some may require scenting with frogs or lizards. 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

Red mountain rat snakes are generally a shy and secretive 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. Although they can be handled for short periods of time, they are still a fairly shy, secretive species that can be nippy and typically will not tolerate frequent and/or prolonged handling (as some hardier species will). 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

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