



\*Photo Credit: Gary Nafis

## Rosy Boa (*Lichanura trivirgata*)

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### **A North American Native Boa**

Rosy boas are only one of two species of boa native to North America and the United States. The other species of North American boa is the Rubber Boa (*Charina bottae*). Rosy boas are a small, heavy bodied boa with a fairly blunt tail. This species of boa can vary quite considerably in coloration and pattern depending on subspecies and locality, with ground color varying from tan, grayish, to cream colored with reddish, to orangish, reddish-orange, or black longitudinal stripes. They are a secretive, primarily nocturnal or crepuscular boa species that typically tend to be very docile and inoffensive snakes, seldom, if ever, offering to bite in self-defense. When threatened, rosy boas will most often coil into a loose ball with their heads hidden in the center, and their blunt tails exposed to distract potential predators. As with most North American species, rosy boas require the proper permits or other documentation in states and provinces in which they are indigenous to.

### **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:** Boidae

**Subfamily:** Erycinae

**Genus:** *Lichanura*

**Species:** *Lichanura trivirgata*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, rosy boas can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more, although up to 30 to 40 years is also not uncommon.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

Rosy boas are indigenous to the southwestern United States, and adjacent areas of northern Mexico. Specifically, they may occur from Hanaupah Canyon in California's Death Valley area, south through Baja California, and into western Sonora, Mexico. Their more specific range can also depend on the subspecies and locality as well. Within their range, rosy boas can occur in primarily terrestrial habitats, including arid to semi-arid and dry deserts, shrublands, chaparral, grasslands, mountainous areas, and open savannahs, scrub forest, and woodlands, where they favor rocky micro-environments, including rocky hillsides, talus slopes, and other similar environments.

### **Origin/History**

*Lichanura trivirgata* Cope, 1861. The different subspecies of rosy boas would have other first describing authors during other years.

There is not much specific information as to when these small North American boas first became kept as pets, although it was probably during at least the 1950's or 1960's, when herpetoculture and the pet trade began in general for many species. Rosy boas became popular with a dedicated subset of hobbyists and enthusiasts, owing to their small adult sizes, docile nature, and variety of locales and subspecies, and even a few genetic color morphs and mutations which would become more popular in captivity by the 1980's and 1990's.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner.

### **Size**

Rosy boas range from 5 to 8 inches as neonates, and usually between 1.3 to 3 feet, or 16 to 36 inches as most adults, although in rarer cases, rosy boas have been documented at up to 4 feet (or about 48 inches).

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial.*** Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Neonate rosy boas can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult rosy boas should be housed in a minimum of a 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Rosy boas 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, orchid bark, or play sand mixtures. 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 rosy boas range from 75 to 82 degrees F on the cool side and 85 to 92 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. Rosy boas should be maintained at

relatively low to moderate relative humidity levels, which may range from about 30 to 50%, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

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

***Carnivorous;*** In the wild, rosy boas are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, and other smaller vertebrates. In captivity, rosy boas 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 previously mentioned, rosy boas are quite placid and innocuous snakes, and reluctant to bite under most circumstances. Some rosy boas can be very food driven, nonetheless. Handle your rosy boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Neonates and wild caught rosy boas may be shy and be inclined to curl into a ball in self-defense, but in general, captive bred and born rosy boas will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older.

**\*\*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:

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