



Chris Lawler

Rough Scaled Sand Boa (*Gongylophis conicus*)

Remarkable Rough Scales

Rough scaled, or roughscale sand boas are a medium to large sand boa species also known as the common sand boa. Sand boas are a small and fossorial (or burrowing) group of snakes; they will conceal themselves in the substrate with only eyes exposed and ambush rodents and lizards. The rough scaled sand boa, however, is often reported to be less fossorial than most other sand boa species, often being found on the surface as well as concealed. This is a heavy bodied sand boa with a ground color of light brown, grayish, to yellowish with a broad darker brown series of zigzag shaped dorsal blotches and keeled scales towards the tail. 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, these sand 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, although they may also bite if given the opportunity. Rough scaled sand boas are a small and easily kept species of erycine boa in the herpetocultural hobby and industry, and possess bold and unique patterning and coloration making them attractive choices to maintain 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: Boidae

Subfamily: Erycinae

Genus: *Gongylophus*

Species: *Gongylophus conicus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, rough scaled sand boas can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more, although up to 30 to 40 years is not uncommon.

Distribution and Habitat

The common, or rough scaled sand boa is a relatively small, terrestrial to semi-fossorial species of Old World boa indigenous to southern to southeastern Asia. More specifically, this species occurs from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, to Sri Lanka. Within this range, common or rough scaled sand boas occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-fossorial environments, including sandy to rocky environments, such as the dry to semi-arid sub-deserts, to dune areas, scrublands, scrub-savannahs, grasslands, rocky steppes and foothills, and agricultural and suburban or residential areas near human habitations. While these species of sand boas are commonly believed to, and do prefer habitats with sandy, viable soil, they can also occur in other such habitats mentioned above as well.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner.

Size

Rough scaled sand boas can attain lengths of 4 to 8 inches as neonates, and up to 2 to 2 1/2 feet, or 24 to 30 inches as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Fossorial to Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Neonate rough scaled sand boas can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult rough scaled sand boas should be housed in a minimum of a 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Rough scaled sand 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 rough scaled sand 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. Rough scaled sand 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, rough scaled sand boas are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, amphibians, smaller reptiles, and other smaller vertebrates. In captivity, rough scaled sand boas can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Newborn, juvenile, and some adult sand boas may require scenting with frogs or lizards, however. In most general 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, young and juvenile sand boas may initially be more nervous and defensive. Handle your sand boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. The rough scaled sand boa can become docile species of sand boa, although some (including neonates) may remain somewhat nippy. The rough scaled tends to be the second most commonly kept sand boa species following the Kenyan sand boa (*G. colubrinus*).

****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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