



*Photo Credit: Gary Nafis

Rubber Boa (*Charina bottae*) and (*Charina umbratica*)

Another North American Native of the Northwest

The Rubber Boa (*Charina bottae*) and (*Charina umbratica*), now split into the Northern Rubber Boa and the Southern Rubber Boa, are two species of small terrestrial boas ranging from western Canada, as well as the western and northwestern United States. The Southern Rubber Boa occurs further south in southern California.

Rubber boas are small, inoffensive snakes seldom offering to bite as a defense. Instead, these small and stout snakes will coil their bodies into a loose ball, while displaying their blunt tail tips, which is a defense mechanism used by several other snakes around the world. Their ground color is uniformly colored with smooth, shiny scales, which can range from tan, yellowish, yellowish-orange, light to dark brown, to olive or olive brown, with a paler yellow ventral (or belly) surface. Rubber boas are a secretive, primarily nocturnal boa species that typically tend to be very docile and inoffensive snakes, seldom, if ever, offering to bite in self-defense.

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: *Charina*

Species: *Charina bottae** and *Charina umbratica**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, rubber boas can attain longevity of 20 to 25 years or more, although up to 35 to 40 years is also known.

Distribution and Habitat

Rubber boas are perhaps the most northern of any of the boa species, being found in the semi-arid deserts, grasslands, steppes, meadows, to deciduous and coniferous forests, and even higher altitude areas from the western to Northwestern United States, from the west coast of California and other Pacific Northwest states into British Colombia (B.C.), Canada. Rubber boas are the only species of boa to occur naturally in Canada as well. Within this range, rubber boas occupy a variety of primarily terrestrial environments, including dry to semi-arid sub-deserts, grasslands, coastal areas, meadows, and chaparral to open, dry deciduous, coniferous, or mixed forests and woodlands, where they favor rocky micro-environments, including rocky areas or hillsides, talus slopes, and other similar environments.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Rubber boas range from 5 to 8 inches as neonates, and 1 ½ to 2 ½ feet, or 18 to 30 inches as adults. They very seldom, if ever, exceed this size range.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Neonate rubber boas can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult rubber boas should be housed in a minimum of a 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Rubber 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, non-toxic potting soil, 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

Rubber boas like it cool. One can use a suitably sized UTH (or tank heating pad), ceramic or radiant heat emitter, or incandescent, UVA/UVB, or other heat producing bulb, but ideal temperatures can be around ambient temperatures of around 70 to 75 degrees F, but not to exceed 85 degrees F. They can be kept as low as 65 degrees F. 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. Rubber 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, rubber boas are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, amphibians, smaller reptiles, and other smaller vertebrates. They may also eat lizards, lizard eggs, and even other smaller snakes.

In captivity, rubber boas can be given small feeder rodents of appropriate size, such pre-killed mice. Newborn, juvenile, and some adult rubber 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 previously mentioned, rubber boas are quite placid and innocuous snakes, and reluctant to bite under most circumstances. Handle your rubber boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Neonates and wild caught boas may be shy and be inclined to curl into a ball in self-defense, but in general, captive bred and born rubber 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

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