



*Photo Credit: Bill Love

Tri-Colored Hognose Snake *(Lystrophis/Xenodon pulcher)*

When Hognose Snakes Become Coral Snake Mimics

Tri colored hognose snakes are relatively small to medium sized stocky bodied colubrid snakes. Other common names include the false coral snake, South American hognose snakes, or banded hognose snake. This species of hognose snake is short and thick bodied, and is tri-colored (hence their common name) with red, black, and yellow or cream, and often superficially resemble kingsnakes or milksnakes (*Lampropeltis spp.*) or coral snakes (*Micrurus spp.*). Their upturned rostral scale, characteristic of all hognose snake species, is also distinctive. Hognose snakes are named for the sharply upturned rostral (nose tip) scale used to burrow. This species also has smooth scales, unlike other hognose snake species that have keeled or semi keeled scales. Also as with other hognose snake species, they will bluff by hissing, flattening their heads and necks, and sometimes feigning death, regurgitating, and/or expelling musk and feces when disturbed or if continued to be harassed or threatened. Hognose snakes also belong to a subfamily of snakes, Xenodontinae, which possess specialized, enlarged rear teeth in their mouths designed for capturing and swallowing frogs, toads, and amphibians. However, hognose snakes are harmless to humans and other larger animals, and serious complications from their bites are quite rare and atypical.

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: Xenodontinae

Genus: *Lystrophis/Xenodon*

Species: *Lystrophis/Xenodon pulcher**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, tri-colored hognose snakes can attain longevity of at least 8 to 10 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Tri-colored hognose snakes are a colorful, relatively small terrestrial to semi-fossorial species of New World colubrid snake indigenous to South America. More specifically, this species ranges from southwestern Brazil, through eastern Bolivia, southern Paraguay, and Argentina. Within this range, these species of unique tricolor hognose snakes occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-fossorial environments, where they may occupy a variety of dry, tropical forests and woodlands, savannahs, and grasslands, to coastal dunes and scrubland within this range.

Origin/History

Xenodon pulcher (Jan, 1863).

Tricolor hognose snakes have been in herpetoculture and the pet trade since at least the 1990's. They would initially be imported in limited numbers; unfortunately, those imported adults turned out to be difficult to acclimate. Many refused to eat, and most customers reported that theirs eventually died without reproducing. By the early 2000s, only a few people in the U.S. were successfully keeping and breeding tricolor hognoses, and finding a captive-born baby to purchase was almost impossible. By 2014 and 2015, however, this would change and these snakes became prolific once a healthy, compatible pair would be bred.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Tri-colored hognose snakes range from 5 to 8 inches as hatchlings, and about 1 ½ to 2 ½ feet, or 18 to 30 inches as most adults. Males tend to remain smaller than females.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Fossorial. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling and juvenile tri-colored hognose snakes can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult tri-colored hognose snakes should be housed in a 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. These snakes are primarily terrestrial, and floor space is more important than height. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding such as 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. Providing a humid hide can also help raise humidity levels that this specific species requires.

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 tri-colored hognose snakes range from 75 to 82 degrees F on the cool side and 80 to 90 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. Tri-colored hognose snakes should be maintained at moderate to somewhat high relative humidity levels from about at least 50 to 60%, with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, tri-colored hognose snakes are carnivorous, and tend to be amphibian and specifically frog and toad specialists, although other vertebrates are also occasionally eaten. In captivity, unlike many other hognose snake species, tri-colored hognose snakes can be switched to, and be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice, although many hatchlings and juveniles may still require scenting. 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 hognose snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. They may flatten their necks, hiss, and mock strike, or occasionally death feign. Handle your tri colored hognose gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most tri colored hognose snakes will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older and tend to grow out of this behavior. As with other hognose species, these species do possess enlarged rear teeth and are mildly venomous. However, they very seldom bite people, and should not be considered dangerous or medically significant, although localized reactions have been reported from these species to varying degrees.

****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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Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. We cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety.

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