



Photo Credit: Unknown, Reptiles in Discuss-Blogger

New Guinea Ground/Viper Boa *(Candoia aspera)*

A Boa in a Viper's Skin

Viper boas are a small, stout bodied species of Old World terrestrial boa that earn their common name from their strong viper like appearances or otherwise resemblance to death adders (*Acanthophis spp.*), which are actually elapids. In a similar fashion to death adders, however, is the fact that these boas possess a lighter colored tail tip which they use in caudal luring while remaining motionless and cryptic in dry leaf litter or other vegetation. This lure often attracts small mammals, birds, amphibians, or reptiles close enough to be consumed. They are also known as the New Guinea ground boas. They are a small, short, very heavy bodied boa species with a relatively flat, wedge shaped head. Ground color can vary considerably with darker alternating rectangular dorsal and lateral blotches on a light to dark brown, yellowish, reddish orange, grayish, blackish, olive, to olive brown ground color. The belly, or ventral surface can range from whitish, tan, or cream colored to reddish orange. When threatened, viper boas may coil into a loose ball with their heads hidden in the center, and their tails exposed to distract potential predators. They may also bite as well, but can make for very intriguing small boa species to maintain in captivity.

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: Boinae

Genus: Candoia

Species: *Candoia aspera**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, viper boas can attain longevity of at least 15 to 25 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The New Guinea ground boa, or viper boa, is a small, terrestrial to semi-fossorial species of Old World boa indigenous to New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, and the Molucca Islands. Within this range, these New Guinea Ground Boas, or Viper Boas occupy primarily terrestrial environments, including the dry, tropical to sub-tropical, open forests, woodlands, and savannahs, to coastal areas, as well as near agricultural and suburban areas, or other disturbed habitats such as plantations, where they are most often found in burrows and humid, ground vegetation and debris such as fallen coconut husks, leaves, and other, similar humid micro-environments.

Origin/History

Candoia aspera (Günther, 1877).

Not much specific information is available as to when viper boas were first kept or imported, although these small and stout Old World boas have been available for many decades, most likely since at least the 1960's or 1970's. Almost all would be wild-collected imports; however, some captive-breeding would occur later. They would readily accept rodents in captivity, although some would be stubborn or picky eaters.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Most adult viper boas seldom exceed 2 to 2 ½ feet, or 24 to 30 inches, with specimens up to 3 feet, or 36 inches being exceptionally large.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Fossorial. Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Neonate viper boas can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult viper boas should be housed in a minimum of a 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Viper 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 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.

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 viper 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. Viper boas should be maintained at relatively moderate to high relative humidity levels, which may range from about 50 to 80%, and with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; In the wild, viper boas are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, amphibians, smaller reptiles, and other smaller vertebrates. In captivity, viper boas can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. Newborn, juvenile, and some adult viper boas may prefer lizards or frogs, or otherwise require scenting with these prey items. 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 viper boas may initially be more nervous and defensive. Handle your viper boa gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. As adults, they can remain somewhat nippy, but many can be readily handled without much difficulty by the intermediate level reptile owner or keeper. Viper boas were a formerly commonly imported species, although their numbers and availability have declined in recent years due to increased importation restrictions among their natural ranges. Imported animals, and to a lesser degree, captive born animals, are still available though.

****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:

Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com

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.

***Copyright, 2023**