
IDENTIFICATION AND HUSBANDRY OF COMMONLY KEPT SNAKES

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ABSTRACT

Snakes are popular pets and the most commonly bred reptiles in captivity. Although many species are kept by hobbyists, the majority of them fall into the families Boidae and Colubridae. Snakes of the family Boidae typically have a head that is distinctly wider than the neck and a heavier body, whereas snakes in the family Colubridae have a head no wider than the neck and a more slender body. There are, however, exceptions to these two rules, so it is best to become familiar with the commonly-kept species in both families. The most commonly kept genera of Colubridae are *Lampropeltis* (kingsnakes and milksnakes), *Elaphe* (ratsnakes), and *Pituophis* (pine, gopher, and bullsnakes). Boidae has two popular subfamilies, boas and pythons. Commonly kept boas include the genera *Boa* (common boas), *Corallus* (tree boas), and *Epicrates* (rainbow boas); the most common python genera include *Python* (ball, Burmese, and blood pythons) and *Morelia* (Australasian pythons).

Proper identification and knowledge of the natural history of a snake is essential for providing proper husbandry, including temperature, humidity, habitat design and size of enclosure. Generally, colubrids are kept at daytime temperatures between 27-29°C (80-85°F) and nighttime temperatures between 21-24°C (70-75°F). Boidae are kept at daytime temperatures of 29-32°C (85-90°F) and nighttime temperatures of 24-29°C (75-80°F). Many species, including the black milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum gaigeae*) and the diamond python (*Morelia s. spilota*), have temperature requirements that vary from these “rules of thumb.” For this and other reasons, it is important to have a basic understanding of natural history when making husbandry recommendations.