

## **BOA CONSTRICTOR CARE**

The Common or Red-tailed Boa (*Boa constrictor constrictor*) originates from the rainforests of Southern America, where it can be found in a variety of places from the forest floor to trees, and even in water at times. They generally live alone apart from at times of reproductive activity. Anyone thinking of owning a boa should carefully consider the size of an adult snake, and consider the space requirement, expense, and dangers of owning such a snake, which can grow at least 2-3m in length, and can live for 20-30 years in captivity.

### **HOUSING**

- As large a vivarium or purpose-built enclosure as possible should be provided to enable room for exercise, and a thermal gradient to be created along the length of the tank (hot to cold). Wooden or fibreglass vivaria will provide the snake with some visual security and ventilation can be provided at snake level. We recommend an absolute minimum vivarium size of 6 foot x 3 foot x 2 foot for an adult snake to allow them to stretch appropriately.
- Good ventilation is required and additional ventilation holes may need to be created.
- Hides are required to provide some security. Artificial plants, cardboard boxes, plant pots, logs or commercially available hides can be used. They should be placed both at the warm and cooler ends of the tank. Boa constrictors also love to climb so sturdy branches can be provided to encourage this.
- There are a number of commercially available substrates available for snakes including aspen, orchid bark, wood chip and cyprus mulch. Care should be taken not to feed your snake directly on the substrate to avoid accidental ingestion and blockages. Newspaper or paper towels are easy to maintain and can work well in the short-term. However, they do not allow for natural behaviours so for longer term housing, it is worth considering more natural substrate types.
- The vivarium should be spot cleaned as soon as any waste appears to help prevent disease and fully cleaned once a month with a reptile safe disinfectant.

### **TEMPERATURES AND HUMIDITY**

- Reptiles depend on external heat sources to regulate their body temperature, so supplementary heating is required to create a temperature range (**see separate handout on heating for reptiles**).
- Typically a basking area is created using a light emitting spot bulb, providing a maximum temperature of ~32°C. This should be kept on all day and turned off at night.
- Heat sources should be attached to a thermostat and temperatures should be measured with a separate digital maximum/minimum thermometer to ensure a suitable temperature range is being achieved. The cool end should be maintained at ~24°C.

- Background heat can be provided with a heat mat (on the back wall) a tubular heater, a heat plate or a ceramic heat emitter. This should be set on a thermostat so that the overnight temperature does not drop below ~24°C.
- Heat sources should be guarded to prevent thermal burns
- Humidity should be checked with a hygrometer and kept moderately high at between 50-80%, this can be achieved by spraying or fogging the enclosure at regular intervals or moving the position of the water bowl as needed.

### **LIGHTING**

- Despite being crepuscular species (active at dawn and dusk), boa constrictors appear to benefit from UV-b light.
- A low level UV light is therefore recommended. This will need to be on all day for 12 hours and at an appropriate distance from the snake as recommended by the manufacturer. A small branch or rock can be placed below the basking site (see separate handout on UV light for reptiles).
- All UV-b bulbs should be changed at least as frequently as manufacturer's instructions or checked regularly for their UV output.

### **WHAT TO FEED**

- Boa constrictors are carnivores and their main diet consists of small mammals. As the snake grows, so will the frequency & amount of food given and an increase in prey size, from pinkie mice to larger prey such as rats should be made. Food should be defrosted and warmed to blood temperature 37°C prior to feeding. Handling should be avoided to stop contamination with human scent.
- Water should always be available and a container is required which will allow the snake to submerge completely. This should be changed daily.

### **SALMONELLA**

- All reptiles can potentially carry Salmonella.
- However it is rarely a cause of illness in reptiles and treatment is not required.
- It can be transmitted to people (especially young children or those who are immuno-compromised) so good hygiene after handling the reptile is important. Generally washing your hands in soap is sufficient. There are commercially available disinfectants that can be used as an alternative.

### **ANNUAL HEALTH CHECKS**

We recommend annual health checks every year for pet reptiles as medical problems are more easily treated if detected at an early stage – **you can register for automatic reminders**

### **INSURANCE**

We highly recommend that you take out a pet insurance policy. For a monthly fee your pet can receive the best treatment at an affordable cost. There is normally an excess to pay for each condition then after that costs are covered up to a set limit. Once you have the policy, please provide us with a copy of your insurance details. There are a lot of different companies and policies available and we suggest you contact a number of them for information- we have a leaflet advising what to look out for. Our advice is to choose a policy which provides cover for chronic illness for the life of your pet. If this policy is too much for you then the best cover you can afford will provide piece of mind in an accident or emergency.