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SNAKES

Pacific Ground Boa

Candoia carinata

Candoia carinata is a small, slender boa with keeled scales and a prehensile tail from forests in Indonesia, New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago. It reaches 45-60 cm, is nocturnal and eats lizards and frogs when young, later also rodents. It gives birth to live young and is kept in a small, warm, humid enclosure with branches and a water bowl.

Family: Boidae Former name: *Boa carinata; Enygrus carinatus*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**45-60 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Dry forest and rainforest**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**80 × 40 × 50 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**26-28 °C**
Temperature, night	**24-26 °C**
Humidity	**50-80%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Not required**
Diet	**Vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Litter size	**5-15 young**
Gestation	**210-270 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

About the species

Candoia carinata is a small, slender boa with a round body, a triangular, flat head with an upturned snout tip and heavily keeled scales. The tail is a strong prehensile tail. The colour varies greatly between animals and islands: grey, beige, black, brown, cream or yellow, and in a few animals orange or red. Most have a flowery, blotched pattern, but there are also animals with stripes, bands or no pattern at all.

Adults average 45-60 cm including the tail. Lifespan has not been documented; the 10-15 years in the specifications is an estimate. The species is nocturnal. Two subspecies are recognised: *C. c. carinata* from New Guinea and nearby islands, and *C. c. tepedeleni* from the Bismarck Archipelago and the Admiralty Islands.

The species must not be confused with *Candoia paulsoni*, a separate species from the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and parts of Indonesia, with a distinct zigzag stripe along the back. It also lacks the white spot just behind the vent that *C. carinata* normally has. In the trade, animals from the genus are often mixed up under the same trade names, so always ask for the scientific name and the animal's origin. Captive-bred animals seldom bite, while wild-caught animals can be bad-tempered.

Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

Distribution and habitat

Candoia carinata lives in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea: on Sulawesi, Sangihe and Talaud, the Moluccas, the islands off the north-west coast of Papua (Misool, Batanta and Salawati), on New Guinea and in the Bismarck Archipelago. The type locality is Ambon. The species does not occur on the Solomon Islands, where *C. paulsoni* lives. Records from Vanuatu probably concern introduced animals.

> **Native range:** Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

HABITAT

Candoia carinata occurs in many kinds of forest, from dry woodland to rainforest, and is often seen in shrubs close to human settlements and plantations. It lives both on the ground and in shrubs and low branches. It is nocturnal and hides by day in leaf litter, hollow trees and under roots and stones.

The climate is warm and humid all year. The species can lie in water, which explains its need for both a water bowl and humid air.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Candoia carinata*, so the recommendations also build on experience with other species in the genus *Candoia*.

An adult *C. carinata* needs an enclosure of at least 80 × 40 × 50 cm (length × width × height). The species uses both the floor and the branches, so the enclosure should have thin branches and twigs at several heights and a floor on which the snake can lie stretched out. Larger enclosures are not necessary, because the snake is small.

The substrate must hold humidity: coconut fibre or peat moss in a layer of 5-10 cm works well. Provide at least two hides, one at each end of the enclosure. The snake is kept alone. The enclosure must be escape-proof with a tight lid.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

TEMPERATURE

By day the enclosure should be 26-28 °C, warmest at one end so that the snake can choose, and 24-26 °C at night. A basking spot is not necessary: the genus does not seek high temperatures, and many animals keep away from the heat source. If the snake is too cold for long, it quickly develops a respiratory infection.

Heat is best supplied by a ceramic heater or a heat mat controlled by a thermostat. Measure the temperature with a thermometer at both ends. A cooling period in winter forms part of breeding (see Breeding).

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should stay at 50-80%. Keep the substrate slightly damp, and mist the enclosure once or twice a week, and more often when the snake is about to shed. Adults typically shed about three times a year.

Provide a water bowl large enough for the snake to lie in. The species soaks and drinks often. Change the water daily.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is nocturnal and needs a fixed day-night rhythm of 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness controlled by a timer. The enclosure should not be brightly lit. UVB is not necessary, and no requirement for UVB in captivity has been documented.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Adult *Candoia carinata* are fed one suitably sized rodent every 3-4 weeks. The species is not very active and has a slow metabolism. Many animals eat only lizards and frogs and must be weaned onto rodents: the rodent is scented with a lizard or frog before it is offered. Offer frozen and thawed rodents with long tongs, and the width of the prey should match the widest part of the snake.

Juveniles are fed every 7-10 days. They often refuse pinkies, but readily take small frogs or lizards, because they instinctively grab fast-moving prey. Do not offer food until the young are at least three weeks old. If they are hard to get started, they can be assist-fed with mouse tails or a pinkie pump. Established young double in size in three to four months.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Candoia carinata is quiet and spends the day hidden. Captive-bred animals are normally calm and seldom bite; wild-caught animals can be bad-tempered. Keep sessions short and calm, and avoid handling during shedding and for 72 hours after a meal. The species is small but easily startled, so hold it low and support it with both hands.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The age at sexual maturity has not been documented for the species. Sexing is easy: males have large, clearly visible spurs by the vent, which females lack, and they can be seen from birth. Females must be fully grown and in good condition before breeding, because gestation lasts many months. Females in the genus breed only every second or third year, so a female should not be bred two years running.

MATING

A cooling period of 4-6 weeks with night temperatures of 18-21 °C and day temperatures of about 27 °C is recommended for the genus *Candoia* to start mating. Several males together with several females often give better results than single pairs, and mating can go on and off for up to eight weeks. In captivity the animals mate from December to April, and the young are born from September to January. Breeding should only be considered with great care, and the offspring must go to good homes.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Candoia carinata is live-bearing and does not lay eggs. Litters normally contain 5-15 young. The figure applies to the species of the genus other than *Candoia paulsoni*, which has far larger litters, and has not been documented for *C. carinata* itself. Gravid females are kept at 27-29 °C.

INCUBATION

Gestation lasts 7-9 months (about 210-270 days) in the genus *Candoia* and has not been documented for the species itself. No eggs are laid, so there is no incubation.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

Newborn young are small and delicate. Keep each one separately in a small box with kitchen roll and a small water bowl. Do not feed in the first three weeks, and then start with small frogs, small lizards or assist-feeding with mouse tails. Once the young feed on their own, they grow quickly.

Health and common mistakes

Candoia carinata is hardy when the climate is right. The typical problems are:

- Respiratory infection if the temperature is too low for long. See a vet if the symptoms last more than a few days.
- Poor shedding in air that is too dry.
- Scale rot when the substrate is constantly wet.
- Refusal of food, especially in juveniles, which are hard to move from frogs and lizards onto rodents.
- Mites, shown by the snake lying constantly in the water bowl.

Snakes hide illness. Weighing, notes on feeding and shedding, and regular checks are the best early warning. Contact a vet with reptile experience if the snake loses weight, has breathing problems or does not eat for several months.

Always ask someone who knows

This guide is a good place to start, but it cannot replace experience. Animals differ, and much of what matters most is learned from people who have kept the species for years. Talk to a breeder, an experienced keeper or a vet who knows reptiles and amphibians before you get the animal - and again if anything looks wrong.