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SNAKES

Emerald Tree Boa

Corallus caninus

Corallus caninus is a slender, arboreal boa from the Guiana Shield in South America. Adults are light green with white markings, the young red-orange. The species grows to about 120-200 cm. Since 2009 the name has covered only the populations north of the Amazon River, while the animals of the Amazon Basin belong to *Corallus batesii*. The species requires a large, tall and humid enclosure and an experienced keeper.

Family: Boidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**120-200 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**15-20 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Rainforest**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**180 × 60 × 120 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-28 °C**
Basking spot	**29-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**22-25 °C**
Humidity	**75-90%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Sexually mature	**36-60 months**
Litter size	**5-20 young**
Gestation	**180-210 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Corallus caninus is a medium-sized boa with a laterally compressed body, a large, pear-shaped head, heat-sensing pits in the labial scales, very long front teeth, a vertical pupil and a prehensile tail. Adults are green with enamel-white markings on the back, often paired triangles or crossbands; rarely is the back completely uniform green. The lips are usually yellow, and the belly is white to yellow. The young are red-orange with white markings, rarely green, and begin to turn green after about 4 months.

Females are longer and heavier than males, which are slimmer. The species reaches about 120-200 cm, and large females can exceed 200 cm. It is thus slimmer and smaller than *Corallus batesii*.

Until 2009 all green *Corallus* in South America were counted as one species. That year the populations of the Amazon Basin were separated as *Corallus batesii*, and the name *C. caninus* today covers only the populations on the Guiana Shield. The species are distinguished by three features: *C. caninus* has few scales across the snout between the third and fourth upper labial scales (2-6, on average 3.4), *C. batesii* more (3-12, on average 6.9). *C. caninus* lacks the white mid-stripe on the back

that *C. batesii* may have, and has almost no white spots on the sides (0-11 versus 0-38). The difference in mitochondrial DNA between the two is 3-16 %. The species can produce fertile offspring together in captivity, so animals of unknown origin can be difficult to identify.

The species is more nervous than *Corallus batesii* and is suited to looking at, not to picking up. The animals are nocturnal. During the day they rest coiled on a branch with the head in the middle of the coil.

Distribution and habitat

Corallus caninus lives on the Guiana Shield in north-eastern South America: Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, eastern and southern Venezuela (Bolívar and Amazonas) and north-eastern Brazil north of the Amazon River and north and east of the Rio Negro (Amapá, Pará, Roraima and Amazonas). The species is found from sea level up to about 200 m.

In the Amazon Basin south of the Amazon River and west of the Rio Negro, *Corallus batesii* lives. The populations in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, which were formerly counted as *C. caninus*, now belong to that species. The boundary between the two species has not been precisely established.

> **Native range:** Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, Venezuela and Brazil.

HABITAT

The species is wholly arboreal and lives in primary and secondary rainforest, often above watercourses, but without depending on open water. It stays in the tree canopy and in lower vegetation and only rarely goes down to the ground. The climate is warm and humid all year round, with more than 1,500 mm of rainfall a year.

During the day the animal lies coiled on a horizontal branch. At night it hunts from ambush, hanging in an S-shaped posture with the head pointing downwards, and takes mainly rodents, opossums and bats. Young animals also take lizards and snakes. Prey is caught with a lightning-fast strike and killed by constriction. The animal drinks raindrops from leaves and from its own body.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult animal needs an enclosure of at least 180 × 60 × 120 cm (length × width × height), and larger and especially taller is better. The length must at least match the length of the snake, so it can stretch out fully, and the height must provide room to seek warmth and humidity at different levels without going down to the floor. The enclosure should open at the front, and the sides should not be transparent, because that makes the animal insecure. A young snake can live in an adult-sized enclosure when there are enough hides.

There must be sturdy but thin horizontal branches at several heights, which the animal can grip well. The branches must be firmly fixed, but preferably removable, so the animal does not have to be pulled off them. Hide boxes under the ceiling and on the sides give security, and live or artificial plants give cover and hold water droplets.

The substrate must be at least 10 cm deep and moisture-retaining, for example 40 % topsoil, 40 % coconut fibre and 20 % sand, with a layer of leaf litter on top. There must be good ventilation without draughts: openings high up on the warm side and low down on the cool side, and preferably a small fan at the cool end. Remove faeces immediately, and replace the entire substrate every 3-6 months.

The animals are kept singly. New animals must be quarantined for 3-6 months.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

TEMPERATURE

Corallus caninus needs even warmth throughout the enclosure and a distinct basking spot. The basking spot, a horizontal branch under the heat source, should be 29-32 °C. The rest of the enclosure should be 24-28 °C during the day, with about 24 °C at the cool end. At night it should be 22-25 °C.

Use several identical heat lamps side by side, so that the whole coiled animal is heated evenly, and place them so that the animal cannot come into contact with them. Use incandescent or infrared lamps, not coloured bulbs. If the room is colder than 22 °C at night, a lightless heat source with a thermostat should maintain the warmth; a heat panel at one end, controlled

by a thermostat with the sensor on the cool side, is a good solution. Measure the temperature in several places and at several heights with an infrared thermometer and fixed sensors.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The humidity must be high and stable: 75-90 %. The species tolerates fluctuating humidity poorly, so stability is more important than the exact figure. The enclosure must be able to dry out between mistings, and there must never be water standing and running down the glass, because stagnant, condensing moisture causes mould and respiratory infection.

Mist the substrate and plants several times a day for short periods, preferably with an automatic misting system and distilled or reverse-osmosis water. Do not spray directly on the animal, because evaporation can cool it down. The animal drinks droplets from the leaves and from its own body, and if a large water bowl is also placed high up next to a branch, it drinks from there as well. Change the water at least once a week. Measure the humidity with two digital hygrometers at different heights. A lack of fluid shows as retained faeces with large urates and incomplete sheds.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is nocturnal and can manage without UVB, but a weak UVB light gives a more distinct daily rhythm and ensures vitamin D3. The species belongs to Ferguson zone 2, with a UV index of about 2-3 at the basking spot. A T5 HO tube of 5-6 % UVB must sit 30-40 cm above the snake's back when it shines through mesh, and 35-45 cm without mesh. The tube must sit on the warm side together with the heat lamps and be replaced every 12 months, even if it still lights up. Preferably measure with a UV meter.

The light must be on for 12 hours a day and off at night. With enough shade and plants, the animal chooses for itself how much light it wants.

Read more: Lighting and UVB Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

FEEDING

Corallus caninus needs whole prey animals: mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, quail and chicks, and rats are the best food. The size follows the animal: from rat pups of 4-6 g for the young up to medium-sized rats for adult females, while males get slightly smaller prey. Use thawed frozen prey rather than live, which can bite and injure the snake. The prey is warmed to 32-38 °C and offered with long tongs, because the animal strikes quickly and may miss.

The prey must weigh about 10 % of the snake's weight and be at most 1-1.5 times as wide as the snake at its widest point. Young animals are fed every 7-10 days, subadults every 10-20 days and adults every 2-4 weeks. The species is naturally slender and easily becomes too fat. It must look muscular, not round, and males in particular are kept slim.

The animal usually defecates after two to three meals, and a fourth meal is given only once it has defecated. The prey can occasionally be dusted lightly with a mix of calcium and vitamins before it is thawed.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Corallus caninus is often nervous and defensive, especially when young, and is not an animal for frequent handling. If it feels threatened, it adopts an S-shaped posture and strikes. The very long front teeth cause deep wounds.

Touch the animal lightly with a hook or a paper roll before it is taken out, so it knows that no food is coming. Never pull it off the branch: if you gently scratch the coiled tail with a fingernail, it releases its grip. The tail is fragile, especially in the first year, and a kink becomes permanent. During handling the animal winds around arms and body to keep its balance; do not let it get around your neck. Wash your hands before and after, and never let children handle the animal alone.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Females are longer and heavier than males, and males are slimmer and have larger spurs. The sex is most reliably determined by probing, by an experienced keeper or a vet. Males are sexually mature after 3-4 years and females after 4-5 years. The female must be muscular, not fat, before she is put to breeding.

MATING

The mating season is typically April-July, and females normally breed only every other year. During mating the male lies close to the female and tries to wrap his tail around hers. Males must be slim when placed with the female, because slim males are more willing to mate. Males can be aggressive towards each other, so only one male is placed with the female.

The female often fasts for several months in the last part of gestation without losing much weight. *Corallus caninus* and *Corallus batesii* can produce fertile offspring together, so the two species must be kept apart in breeding.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Corallus caninus gives birth to live young. Gestation lasts 6-7 months. A litter is typically 5-12 young, on average about 10, but can reach 20. The pregnant female must have access to both warmth and water, because lack of fluid can cause young that become stuck at birth. The female does not care for the young after birth.

INCUBATION

There are no eggs to incubate, because the species gives birth to live young. During gestation the female needs a stable, warm gradient, fresh water and peace, and the humidity must be kept stable. The young are separated from the female as soon as they are born, and unfertilised eggs and stillborn young are removed.

REARING THE YOUNG

Newborn young are 40-50 cm long, weigh 20-50 g and are red-orange. After about 4 months they begin to turn green. Keep each young one separately in a small box with branches, damp substrate and a hide, and position the branches so the young one can reach both the floor and the water dish.

The young shed within two weeks of birth, and only then is food offered: a thawed rat pup of 4-6 g, warmed well. After that food is offered about every 7-10 days. Some of the young take the rat pup on their own; the rest may take a live dwarf hamster or young mouse or need to be assisted with feeding for a time. It is easier to get the young started than with *Corallus batesii*. At about 6 months of age most feed steadily and can move on to rats of suitable size.

Health and common mistakes

Most problems are caused by mistakes in the setup. Typical problems are:

- Dehydration at low humidity: retained faeces with large urates and shed that sticks.
- Respiratory infection in air that is too cold, stagnant or too damp: the animal breathes with its mouth open or has mucus in the mouth.
- Obesity from feeding too often or too much: the species must be muscular, not round.
- Kink or bump in the tail after tail yanking, especially in young animals.
- Mites and internal parasites, especially in wild-caught animals. Use captive-bred animals and quarantine new animals.
- Regurgitation from prey that is too large or a temperature that is too low.
- Mould and bacteria from persistent condensing moisture.

Weigh the animal regularly and keep a log of weight, feeding and sheds. A sudden weight loss is often the first sign of illness. Reptiles hide illness, so see a vet with reptile experience if the animal does not eat, loses weight, breathes with its mouth open or seems lethargic.

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

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.