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SNAKES

Amazon Tree Boa

Corallus hortulana

Corallus hortulana is a slender, arboreal boa from the Amazon and the Guiana region. It reaches 120-190 cm, comes in many colours and lies in wait for prey on a branch at night. It is often defensive and suits an experienced keeper with room for a large enclosure.

Family: Boidae Former name: *Corallus hortulanus; Corallus enydris*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**120-190 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**15-20 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Savanna, dry forest and rainforest**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 60 × 90 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**27-29 °C**
Basking spot	**31-34 °C**
Temperature, night	**21-24 °C**
Humidity	**40-70%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Optional** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Sexually mature	**36-48 months**
Litter size	**2-29 young**
Clutches per year	**1**
Gestation	**180-240 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Corallus hortulana is a slender, laterally compressed boa with a long, prehensile tail and a large head that is clearly wider than the neck. The teeth at the front of the jaws are very long. The ground colour ranges from black, brown and grey to every shade of red, orange and yellow, and many animals have dark hourglass or diamond patterns along the body. Some have no pattern at all. The head typically has five dark stripes running from the eyes, the eyes are yellowish, greyish or reddish, and the tongue is black. In the trade there are both strongly coloured animals in red, orange and yellow and more subdued animals in brown and olive.

Adults are typically 120-160 cm and 3-5 cm in diameter, and the largest reach about 190 cm. Males are slightly smaller and slimmer than females. Newborns are about 30 cm.

The species has previously been described as *Corallus hortulanus*, and in older literature it often appears as *Corallus enydris*. The Caribbean forms, which were formerly treated as subspecies, are now separate species, including *Corallus cookii* and *Corallus grenadensis*. The species is a close relative of *Corallus caninus* and *Corallus batesii*.

The species is not suited to frequent handling. Wild-caught animals are almost always aggressive, and even captive-bred young can seem defensive. Most captive-bred animals become calmer with age, but never as calm as *Python regius* or *Boa constrictor*. Many animals still bite when you work in the enclosure.

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

Distribution and habitat

Corallus hortulana lives east of the Andes in South America: in southern Colombia and Venezuela, in Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana, in large parts of Brazil, and in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. It is the most widespread of the tree boas and occurs both in the Amazon basin and along the east coast of Brazil, as far south as the Tropic of Capricorn. It lives from sea level up to about 900 m, but mostly below 300 m.

The Caribbean forms no longer belong to the species. Many animals in the trade are wild-caught and come mainly from Guyana and Suriname.

> **Native range:** Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

HABITAT

Corallus hortulana is almost entirely arboreal. In the wild it lives in humid rainforest with more than 1,500 mm of rain a year, but also in drier forest, savanna, scrub, secondary forest, farmland and near human settlements. It prefers places where the canopy is continuous, so it can move from tree to tree without coming down. It is common along rivers and in flooded forest. Young animals stay low in bushes, where they hunt lizards at night, while adults usually sit two metres or more above the ground.

The snake is most active at night, but can also be active by day. It is an ambush predator: it hangs the front of its body in an S-shaped curve from a branch and strikes at prey from a surprisingly long distance. With heat-sensitive pits along the lips it finds prey in the dark. The prey is very varied: young animals take small lizards and frogs, adults take birds, bats and rodents, and occasionally larger mammals.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult *Corallus hortulana* needs an enclosure of at least 120 × 60 × 90 cm (length × width × height). The species is active and moves mostly horizontally between the branches, so floor area matters more than height. The snake must be able to move without its body crossing itself. The enclosure needs good ventilation and a lid that can be locked.

Branches are the most important part of the furnishings. Provide several horizontal branches of different thickness and height that can bear the animal's weight. They should be about as thick as the snake's body, so it can lie with several points of contact. *C. hortulana* lies more stretched out on the branches than *C. caninus*, which coils over a single branch. Fix the branches securely. The substrate is leaf litter, coconut fibre or bark mulch; never use cedar. Live plants raise the humidity and provide cover.

Provide hides both high up and down near the floor, for example of cork or an upturned flowerpot. The hide must be small enough that the snake sits snugly in it, and grow with the snake. New animals are quarantined in a plain enclosure with newspaper, stable branches and a water bowl; this is also easy to clean.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

TEMPERATURE

During the day the temperature in the enclosure should be 27-29 °C. Over a branch at one end, a heat lamp should provide a basking spot of 31-34 °C, which the snake uses for a few hours a day. Pregnant females and animals that have just eaten often lie there for a long time. Switch off the heat lamp at night and let the temperature fall to 21-24 °C.

Measure with thermometers at both ends of the enclosure and an infrared thermometer at the basking spot. The lamp must be mounted high enough that the snake cannot touch it. Use a thermostat.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Corallus hortulana comes from a tropical climate, and the humidity should be 40-70 %, highest at night and lower during the day, when the heat dries the air. Raise it slightly during a shed. Mist the enclosure heavily every evening so the animal can drink water droplets from leaves and body. Many tree boas drink droplets more readily than from a bowl, especially newly imported animals, which may be dehydrated.

Also place a bowl of fresh water in the enclosure, preferably high up, and change the water every day. If the water is moved, for example with an air stone, the snake drinks more easily. A snake that lies in the water bowl often has mites. Dehydration can cause regurgitation and refusal to eat.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Corallus hortulana is nocturnal, and UVB is not necessary. A weak UVB light (zone 2, a UV index of about 2-3 at the basking spot) can support the daily rhythm, but the figure is borrowed from *Corallus caninus*. Provide 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness, controlled by a timer.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Corallus hortulana eats rodents, and most take mice from the first day. Give frozen and thawed prey on long tongs, not live. The prey must be no more than 20 % wider than the snake's body at its widest point. Young animals and juveniles are fed every week; adults get a medium-sized meal every 10-14 days. The species will eat more than it needs and easily becomes overweight if fed more often. Calcium and vitamin supplements can be an advantage for growing young animals and breeding females.

A hungry snake is restless or sits with the front of its body in an S-shaped curve. Be careful when you open the enclosure when it is in a feeding mood.

Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Corallus hortulana is often nervous and defensive and not an animal for frequent handling. The snake can reach at least half its body length when it strikes, and the long teeth cause deep wounds. Use a snake hook or long tongs, and let the snake get used to you slowly. Touch it lightly with the hook before you take it, so it knows there is no food coming.

A hide with a small entrance that can be closed off makes it possible to move the snake during cleaning without touching it. Always support the snake with two hands, and do not let it get around your neck. Wash your hands after handling.

The species is solitary and must be kept singly. Two males must never be kept together, and especially not when there is a female, because it ends in fighting and injury.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Females are typically slightly longer and heavier than males. Sex is most reliably determined by probing by an experienced keeper or a veterinarian. Both sexes become sexually mature after about 3-4 years. The female should be muscular and not fat before she is bred.

MATING

Mating is seasonal. In captivity it is induced by lowering the night temperature gradually from about 25 °C to 21-22 °C from November to December while providing a daytime temperature of 28-29 °C. After about two months, the males begin to show courtship behaviour, and they often shed just before. The female is most receptive shortly after a shed. Put the male in with the female in her enclosure. Mating typically takes place from February to May and is repeated several times. If the female is moved to another male after a week, the scent of the first male often stimulates the next.

Never put several males in with one female at the same time. They become very aggressive and can seriously injure the female.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Corallus hortulana gives birth to live young and does not lay eggs. Gestation lasts 6-8 months, most often about seven, and the female often lies in the basking spot. A litter is 2-29 young. Dead young and infertile eggs often come out as well; after a few days, gently feel the female's belly to check that all the young have been born. The female has young at most once a year.

The pregnant female needs quiet and constant access to warmth and water. She should be fed regularly, but many females eat less in the last weeks.

INCUBATION

There is no incubation, because the young are born live and are independent from the first day. The pregnant female needs the same gradient as usual so she can regulate her temperature. Birth takes place in the enclosure. Remove dead young and birth membranes as soon as you notice them.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are about 30 cm at birth. Keep them singly in small enclosures with branches, a hide and high humidity. The first shed comes after 8-14 days, and they normally do not eat until after it. The young usually take small mice and are fed every week until they are half grown. If a youngster will not eat, try both dead and live prey and different kinds; once it has eaten three times, it usually carries on by itself.

Health and common mistakes

Corallus hortulana is robust, but imported animals often have problems, and most problems are caused by husbandry mistakes. The typical mistakes are:

- Dehydration in newly imported animals, which causes regurgitation and refusal to eat. Mist often, and offer water that is placed high up and moving.
- Internal and external parasites in wild-caught animals. Have a faecal sample examined by a veterinarian, and keep new animals in quarantine in a plain enclosure.
- Mites, especially if the snake lies in the water bowl.
- Too low a temperature, which causes poor digestion and regurgitation.
- Obesity in animals that are fed too often. Adults need only one meal every 10-14 days.
- Stress in animals without good hides. Provide hides at several heights, and handle the animal as little as possible.

A healthy animal has clear eyes and a firm body and eats readily. Contact a veterinarian with reptile experience if the snake loses weight, regurgitates repeatedly, has an open mouth or wheezing breathing, or if birth drags on.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

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.