herpy

SNAKES

False Water Cobra

Hydrodynastes gigas

Hydrodynastes gigas is a large, fast and inquisitive diurnal colubrid from South American wetlands that can grow to over two metres long. When threatened it flattens its neck like a cobra but keeps its body horizontal. It is rear-fanged and mildly venomous: most bites cause only local pain and swelling, but a few cause a strong reaction. It needs a very large terrarium.

Family: Colubridae Former name: *Cyclagras gigas; Hydrodynastes melanogigas*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**150-250 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**1,000-4,500 g**
Lifespan	**15-20 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and semi-aquatic**
Habitat	**Savanna and wetland**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**240 × 90 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-27 °C**
Basking spot	**30-33 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-23 °C**
Humidity	**30-60%**
Water	**Water section**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Winter rest	**15-21 °C** 6-10 weeks
Diet	**Vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**6-42 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**75 days** at 27-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult animal needs a terrarium of at least 240 × 90 × 60 cm (length × width × height), and more is always better. *Hydrodynastes gigas* is active and patrols all day, so floor area is what matters most.

TEMPERATURE

H. gigas requires a distinct temperature gradient. By day the background temperature should be 24-27 °C, and the basking spot should be 30-33 °C. At night the temperature falls to 20-23 °C.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be moderate, 30-60%, all year. *Hydrodynastes gigas* is not a rainforest species and does poorly in constantly wet surroundings, but a damp layer in the substrate and a humid hide help during shedding.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal and spends a lot of time patrolling and basking. Strong light and UVB give more natural behaviour, and the snake prefers to go under a UVB source rather than under a heat lamp of the same temperature.

FEEDING

In the wild *Hydrodynastes gigas* eats mostly amphibians, fish and reptiles, and only a little birds and mammals.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

H. gigas is inquisitive, clever and active, and it spends the day patrolling, swimming, digging and climbing. It needs a lot of space. Animals that do not get enough space may begin to pace back and forth along the glass.

NATIVE RANGE

Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana and Venezuela.