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SNAKES

Western Ratsnake

Pantherophis obsoletus

Pantherophis obsoletus is a large, slender and agile snake from the central USA. In the north adults are glossy black with a white chin and throat, further south often brown, grey or yellowish with dark blotches. It reaches 110-180 cm, climbs and swims well and is more defensive than *Pantherophis guttatus*. It needs a large enclosure, but is otherwise hardy and feeds willingly.

Family: Colubridae Former name: *Elaphe obsoleta; Pantherophis obsoletus lindheimeri* Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**110-180 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**10-20 years**
Active	**By day, at dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Savanna and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**180 × 90 × 90 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**22-25 °C**
Basking spot	**29-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**50-70%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Winter rest	**10-15 °C** 8-12 weeks
Diet	**Vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**36-84 months**
Clutch size	**12-20 eggs**
Incubation	**65-70 days** at 27-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE
An adult *Pantherophis obsoletus* needs an enclosure of at least 180 × 90 × 90 cm (length × width × height). The species is active and climbs, so height and climbing opportunities are important. Bigger is always better.

TEMPERATURE
There must be a clear gradient so the snake can choose for itself. The basking spot under the heat source should be 29-32 °C, and the cool end 22-25 °C. At night the temperature may fall to 18-22 °C, and the heat is switched off.

HUMIDITY AND WATER
Humidity should be 50-70 %, lowest during the day and highest at night. Mist as needed, and put moist sphagnum in the hide in the cool end.

LIGHTING AND UVB
Pantherophis obsoletus is active both day and night and needs a clear daily rhythm with strong daylight. The light is on for about 12 hours a day, controlled by a timer.

FEEDING
Pantherophis obsoletus eats whole, frozen and thawed rodents. Young snakes get mice, and in time they move on to rats. Quail eggs, quail chicks and small chicks can add variety.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING
Pantherophis obsoletus is more defensive than most colubrids. It gapes, vibrates its tail against the substrate so that it rattles, and can strike without hesitation. Some animals also release a foul-smelling fluid.

NATIVE RANGE
United States.