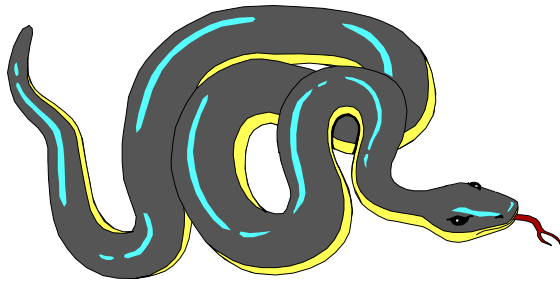


Elands Veterinary Clinic.

CLIENT INFORMATION SHEET.

Captive Husbandry of the Colombian Boa Constrictor (*Boa constrictor* spp.)



Elands Veterinary Clinic.

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INTRODUCTION

The gracious shape, coloration and relative docile nature of this medium-sized snake makes the boa constrictor (*Boa constrictor* spp) one of the most popular reptile pets. Boas are amongst the longest lived of all species of snakes reaching twenty years or more.

VIVARIUM DESIGN AND THE CAPTIVE ENVIRONMENT

The floor area of the vivarium must not be less than the length of the snake. It is recommended that a single adult is kept in a vivarium measuring a minimum of 6'x2'. The vivarium should be of melamine construction. Plenty of height (24") to the vivarium, will allow the provision of overhead lights and heaters. In adequate ventilation resulting in respiratory infections is common, providing a 2" strip of fine mesh along the middle of the back wall of the cage, with two 12"x3" controllable ventilation panels at opposite ends will suffice. Never reduce ventilation to maintain a high humidity. The 6mm sliding glass doors should be mounted on a 6" strip of melamine and kept locked.

HEATING

In order to provide some degree of backup, it is wise to use more than one heater and an accurate thermostat. Provide an accurately controlled thermal gradient which ranges from a maximum basking area at one end to a minimum cool area at the other. Ceramic heaters, soil-warming cables and underfloor heater mats can be used to provide day and night heating, while spotlights can only be used during the day. All heating devices must be screened if fatal or disfiguring burns are to be avoided. Ceramic heaters and spot lights can be housed within mesh cages while heater mats and warming cables can be hidden under a false floor. Proportional auto-dimming thermostats are recommended (e.g. Habi-Stat, Microclimate, and Vivarium Temperature Controller). Check the performance of the thermostat against an accurate thermometer.

VIVARIUM FURNISHINGS

All vivaria must be properly furnished to meet the needs of the snake. The floor substrate should be nontoxic, uncontaminated, absorptive, cheap and easy to replace. Newspaper or artificial turf are recommended. Hide boxes or shelters are essential for this crepuscular species. Cardboard boxes are cheap and disposable but cork bark is more attractive and provides a better surface on which to shed. However, cork bark is more expensive and difficult to clean. Boas are able climbers and secure branches should be provided. Boas often bathe for hours on end, and therefore a water container large enough for the snake to completely immerse itself is essential. An accurate min/max thermometer and humidity meter should be permanently positioned within the vivarium for daily observation.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

In general, adult boas should be maintained at 60-90% humidity. Provide a day time high temperature (DTH) of 29.5-32C (85-90F) and

a basking area of 33-35C (92-95F). At night, a night time low temperature (NTL) of 27-28.5C (80-84F) and a basking temperature to 30-31C (86-88F) can be provided. Young specimens (<12 months) often prefer slightly higher temperatures. Spot lights can be used to provide the 14 hour light, 10 hour dark photoperiod.

FEEDING

The boids are best fed on lean rodents of an appropriate size, i.e. of approximately the same girth as the snake. Snakes up to 3' should be fed 1-2 appropriately sized mice every 5-7 days. From 3'-6' they should be fed 1-2 rats every 7-10 days, and from 6' and over, progressively more rats or a rabbit every two to four weeks. All snakes can be regularly offered Avimix (Vetark) available from the practice reception. Provide clean water in a container large enough for the snake to bathe.

VIVARIUM MAINTENANCE

The vivarium and snakes should be checked at twice daily. All faecal material, shed skins, soiled substrate etc must be removed as soon as possible. The water bowl, artificial turf and vivarium should be thoroughly washed and disinfected using Tamodine-E (Vetark) available from reception.

RECORD KEEPING

Keep records of purchase, sloughing, accepted and refused feeds, diseases and treatments, regular measurements of weight and length, can be of enormous help when investigating a disease. Elands Veterinary Clinic offers full in-house blood biochemistry, haematology, and faecal analyses. The practice also provides full hospitalisation facilities, radiography, endoscopy, propofol and isoflurane anaesthesia, and a fully equipped sterile theatre with electrosurgery and microsurgery facilities.