

Sand Boas

Introduction to Sand Boas

Most sand boas are short, chunky snakes and make excellent captives. The most common species, the Kenyan Sand Boa, is available in a myriad of color and pattern morphs. Adult female Kenyans reach 18" and males usually max out at 12".

Captive Care

Sand Boas are small compared to most pet snakes. Small specimens can do well in a 10-gallon terrarium and a pair of adults can be kept in a 20-gallon long to 30-breeder terrariums. Though they are not climbers, we suggest adding a secure screen top. This top will keep out the family pets and will make sure your snake doesn't climb out.

Many keepers, especially those with larger collections keep their sand boas in plastic shoe or sweater boxes. These "tubs" are inexpensive and easy to clean. They must, however, be perforated with lots of ventilation holes as these snakes do not do well in humid conditions with little or no air flow.

Substrate

Though it would seem that sand is the best substrate for sand boas, most keepers use Aspen chips or Aspen shavings for their sand boas. Sand is heavy and loose and doesn't allow sand boas to build tunnels. A mixture of ½ play sand and ½ peat moss can be used for a more naturalistic setup. Add in plants and rocks (firmly placed on the bottom of the enclosure before adding the substrate) for these setups. As with other substrates, we suggest adding about 4" - 6" of substrate for all but the smallest boas. As it gets packed down, it will allow the boa a chance to build a burrow that holds its shape.

Some snake keepers use newspaper for their sand boas. We do not believe that newspaper is a proper substrate for any herps. It is dirty and unnatural (especially for a burrowing species).

Temperature

During most of the year, sand boas should be kept between 75° and 85° F. Some species will need access to a warmer area that is in the 85° to 90° F range. This hotter area should be created at one end of an enclosure and not all over. This hot area will be used by snakes when they are digesting food, when pregnant females need some extra warmth, etc. The best way to achieve the temperature gradient from cooler to warmer is to place a reptile heat mat outside one end of the cage. Be sure to establish this temperature gradient (from 75° to 80° F at one end and 85° to 90° F at the other end before you get your snake. It is very important to the long-term health of your sand boa that you get this established correctly.

Watering Sand Boas

Even though these are "desert" species, we keep a small, shallow water dish in each sand boa cage. We only occasionally see them paying any attention to the water dish, but it is there in case they need a drink or a little extra humidity during shedding. We typically use a small plastic petrie dish or plant saucer.

Sand Boas are very easy snakes to keep and are quite enjoyable. They love to hide beneath the substrate so they are not wonderful display animals however their unique behaviors and ease of maintenance and ease of captive production make them interesting captives.

Feeding Sand Boas

All ages of sand boas will readily eat rodents. A keeper should be careful to feed his or her sand boas rodents that are considerably smaller than he or she would feed a similarly sized Corn Snake or kingsnake. We routinely offer our small sand boas the smallest pink mice and even large adults seem to prefer to eat fuzzies or hoppers, even when they appear large enough to take adult mice. We feed live rodents to most of our boas as we have found that many will refuse to eat thawed rodents. Many keepers feed their sand boas thawed mice, but we have found that the thawed mice, even when dried thoroughly will often get coated with substrate more often than rodents.

The sand boas that do feed on thawed mice get the same routine as all of our other snakes. The thawed rodent is warmed then dried as completely as possible. Then, the rodent is warmed again by holding it with hemostats under a heat lamp for a few seconds. The boas are then offered the rodent from the forceps. Many will instinctively grab the rodent and constrict it.

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