Epicrates cenchria cenchria

Brazilian Rainbow Boa

Other names: N/A

Physical Description: Reddish-brown, round-bodied, medium sized snake with smooth, soft scales and great iridescence. Three parallel stripes on the head and neck give way to black rings down the back. Length: 4 – 6 feet at maturity.
Weight: 2 – 3 lbs.

The boas are members of the family of snakes called Boidea which is represented by about 40 species of snakes. The name boidea is derived from a traditional Brazilian language that described the anaconda as mboi. Members of this family are found in the tropics of the Americas, Africa, Madagascar, Asia and a few species on the West coast of North America. They range in size from sand boas which seldom grow more than 3 feet in length to one of the largest snakes in the world, the anaconda, which has been recorded at over 35 feet long!

Diet in the Wild: Rodents, small mammals, birds.

Diet at the Zoo: Rodents

Habitat & Range: The Amazon basin of Brazil, Southern Venezuela, Guyana, French Guiana and Suriname

Life Span: Approx. 10 years in the wild. 20-30 yrs. avg. in captivity.

Perils in the wild: Predators such as birds of prey, small mammals and other reptiles all can prey on young snakes of any species. Human activity can also have a negative effect on snakes in the wild.

Behavioral Adaptations:
- Rainbow boas are nocturnal.
- Like most snakes, rainbow boas are mainly solitary.

Reproduction and Development:
- Most reptiles hatch from eggs. However, boas are viviparous. This means that rather than laying eggs, the young develop in membranous egg sacs retained within the female throughout gestation. Theses egg sacs do not have hard or leathery shells as they would if they had been laid prior to hatching. The growing babies gain nutrients from the yolk, which is fully absorbed before birth. They are born with umbilical cords that break off shortly after birth and heal with their first shed.
Additional Information:

- Generally helpful to man through control of rodent populations. Snakes are often killed for their meat and leather or captured for the animal trade.

Are boas or python family?

- Some herpetologists (a scientist who studies snakes) divide the pythons and boas into separate families or subfamilies. Which ever classification scheme one adheres to, the boas and pythons are closely related snakes. What is similar is that they are all primitive snakes with similar physical characteristics. What is different is the New World boas are bear live young while the Old World pythons are egg laying.

Ecological Role of Reptiles:

- Snakes play an important role as both prey and predator in ecosystems all over the world. They can be very important in regulating the populations of pest species such as rodents which are common around human activity.
- Don’t buy pets if you don’t know where they are from – ongoing trade in reptile products has a huge effect on the numbers of valuable species in the wild. Even buying tropical species from legal sources increases demand and encourages illegal trading.

Conservation Status: (IUCN Status)

Not Assessed

Conservation Efforts:

N/A. Although common in many parts of their range, habitat destruction and human encroachment threaten the future of this species. Because of their beautiful coloring, they are one of the most sought after exotic snakes for the pet trade. In the 1980’s hundreds of Brazilian rainbow boas were removed from the wild and exported for sale. Many of the individuals did not survive the process, spurring conservation friendly captive breeding programs available today. In some areas of their range, indigenous people encourage the snakes to cohabitate around their villages to control rodent populations that have had serious health effects on the people and their crops.

Glossary: List of definitions of the most important recurrent technical terms used in the text.

boidea - The family level of classification snakes described as boas. Boidea is represented by about 40 species of snakes.

viviparous - reproduction in which eggs develop within the females body, with the nutritional aid of maternal parent as in the mammals, many reptiles and some fishes.

Jacobson’s organ- A pair of pit-like organs on the roof of the mouth that are lined with olfactory cells and nerves that interpret chemical stimuli in an animal’s surroundings.

Sources:

- Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Gardens
The Sacramento Zoological Society