

Common Boa

Boa constrictor imperator

Kingdom Animalia
Phylum Chordata
Class Reptilia
Order Squamata
Family Boidae

Native to: Central Mexico through Central America and into northern and central South America

Status: Threatened
(CITES Appendix II)



Boa Constrictors are hunted for their fine skins and for sale in the exotic pet trade. Some boa constrictor species are endangered and most have a protected status in their regions, however most populations are not in danger of immediate extinction.

Appearance and Lifespan

Boa Constrictors are large snakes that can be between 1-4 metres (3.5-13 ft) in length and weigh approximately 35-45 kg. They have a narrow head with a pointed snout and can be coloured black, olive-green, brown or grey. Every snake has a distinct pattern of lines, spots, ovals and diamonds.

Boas can live up to 25 years in the wild and up to 30 years or more in captivity. The oldest common boa in captivity was recorded to have lived 40 years.



Behaviour and

Reproduction

Boa Constrictors are very peaceful and elusive and will avoid any contact with large animals. Boas are both terrestrial and arboreal, especially the smaller snakes. They are solitary animals except during the breeding season, and mating occurs about once a year. The female releases a scent to attract a male. Boas are viviparous, meaning that the female does not lay eggs and the young are fully formed at birth.

After a gestation period of 4-8 months, 6-60 live young are born. Boa Constrictors become sexually mature at about 2-3 years of age.

Ecology and Conservation

As their name suggests, Boa Constrictors constrict their prey. This involves the snake tightly coiling around the prey, not crushing it, but severely restricting movement. As the prey breathes out the tightening coils prevent the prey from inhaling. Very quickly the prey will asphyxiate (suffocate). To accomplish this, Boa Constrictors are extremely muscular and usually heavy bodied snakes. The Boa Constrictor will often prey on bats by hanging from trees or waiting at the mouths of caves. The will also hunt birds, mammals and other reptiles and generally hunt at night.

Boas are hunted for their skins as well as for sale in the exotic pet world. Their natural predators include crocodiles and jaguars and, of course, humans. Most boas species are not threatened or in danger of immediate extinction, however most have a protected status in their regions.

Did You Know?

1. The longest recorded Boa was measured at 18 ft long.
2. The Common Boa flicks its tongue to pick up scents.
3. They are able to swim but would rather stay on dry land.

