

Snakes

Information on a large number of snakes.

- [Ball Python \(*Python regius*\)](#)
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- [Corn Snake \(*Pantherophis guttatus*\)](#)

Ball Python (*Python regius*)

220px-Ball_python_lucy.jpg

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Ball Python (*Python regius*)

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Squamata
Suborder:	Serpentes
Family:	Pythonidae
Genus:	Python
Species:	<i>P. regius</i>

The **ball python** (*Python regius*), also called the **royal python**, is a [python](#) species native to [West](#) and [Central Africa](#), where it lives in grasslands, shrublands and open forests. This [nonvenomous constrictor](#) is the smallest of the African pythons, growing to a maximum length of 182 cm (72 in).^[2] The name "ball python" refers to its tendency to curl into a ball when [stressed](#) or frightened.^[3]

The ball python is black, or albino and dark brown with light brown blotches on the back and sides. Its white or cream belly is scattered with black markings. It is a stocky snake with a relatively small head and smooth scales.^[3] It reaches a maximum adult length of 182 cm (6 ft 0 in). Males typically measure eight to ten [subcaudal scales](#), and females typically measure two to four subcaudal scales.^[7] Females reach an average snout-to-vent length of 116.2 cm (45+3/4 in), a 44.3 mm (1+3/4 in) long jaw, an 8.7 cm (3+7/16 in) long tail and a maximum weight of 1.635 kg (3 lb 9.7 oz). Males are smaller with an average snout-to-vent length of 111.3 cm (43+13/16 in), a 43.6 mm (1+23/32 in) long jaw, an 8.6 cm (3+3/8 in) long tail and a maximum weight of 1.561 kg (3 lb 7.1 oz).^[8] Both sexes have [pelvic spurs](#) on both sides of the vent. During [copulation](#), males use these spurs for gripping females.^[9] Males tend to have larger spurs, and sex is best determined by manual eversion of the male [hemipenes](#) or inserting a probe into the [cloaca](#) to check the presence of an inverted hemipenis.^[10]

Taxonomy

Boa regia was the [scientific name](#) proposed by [George Shaw](#) in 1802 for a pale variegated python from an indistinct place in Africa.^[4] The [generic](#) name *Python* was proposed by [François Marie Daudin](#) in 1803 for non-venomous flecked snakes.^[5] Between 1830 and 1849, several generic names were proposed for the same [zoological specimen](#) described by Shaw, including *Enygrus* by [Johann Georg Wagler](#), *Cenchris* and *Hertulia* by [John Edward Gray](#). Gray also described four specimens that were collected in Gambia and were preserved in spirits and fluid.^[6]

Distribution and habitat

The ball python is native to west [Sub Saharan Africa](#) from [Senegal](#), [Mali](#), [Guinea-Bissau](#), [Guinea](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [Liberia](#), [Ivory Coast](#), [Ghana](#), [Benin](#), and [Nigeria](#) through [Cameroon](#), [Chad](#), and the [Central African Republic](#) to [Sudan](#) and [Uganda](#).^[1] It prefers grasslands, [savannas](#), and sparsely wooded areas.^[3]

Behaviour and ecology

Ball pythons are typically nocturnal or crepuscular, meaning they are active during dusk, dawn, and/or nighttime.^[11] This species is known for its defense strategy that involves coiling into a tight

ball when threatened, with its head and neck tucked away in the middle. This defense behavior is typically employed in lieu of biting, which makes this species easy for humans to handle and has contributed to their popularity as a pet.^[3]

In the wild, ball pythons favor mammal burrows and other underground hiding places, where they also [aestivate](#). Males tend to display more semi-arboreal behaviors, whilst females tend towards terrestrial behaviors.^[12]

Diet

The diet of the ball python in the wild consists mostly of small mammals and birds. Young ball pythons of less than 70 cm (28 in) prey foremost on small birds. Ball pythons longer than 100 cm (39 in) prey foremost on small mammals. Males prey more frequently on birds, and females more frequently on mammals.^[12] Rodents make up a large percentage of the diet; [Gambian pouched rats](#), [black rats](#), [rufous-nosed rats](#), [shaggy rats](#), and [striped grass mice](#) are among the species consumed.^[13]

Threats

The Ball python is listed as [Near Threatened](#) on the [IUCN Red List](#); it experiences a high level of exploitation and the population is believed to be in decline in most of West Africa.^[1] The ball python is primarily threatened by [poaching](#) for the international exotic [pet trade](#). It is also hunted for its skin, meat and use in [traditional medicine](#). Other threats include habitat loss as a result of intensified agriculture and pesticide use.^[1] Rural hunters in Togo collect gravid females and egg clutches, which they sell to snake ranches. In 2019 alone, 58 interviewed hunters had collected 3,000 live ball pythons and 5,000 eggs.^[14]

In captivity

Ball pythons are the most popular pet snake and the second most popular pet reptile after the bearded dragon.^[15] According to the IUCN Red List, while captive bred animals are widely available in the pet trade, capture of wild specimens for sale continues to cause significant damage to wild populations.^[1] Wild-caught specimens have greater difficulty adapting to a captive environment, which can result in refusal to feed, and they generally carry internal or external [parasites](#).^[citation]

[needed](#)[]] This species can do quite well in captivity, regularly living for 15-30 years with good care.

[\[16\]](#) The oldest recorded ball python in captivity is 62 years, 59 of those at the [Saint Louis Zoo](#).[\[17\]](#)

Breeding

Captive ball pythons are often bred for specific patterns that do not occur in the wild, called "morphs."[\[18\]](#) Breeders are continuously creating new designer morphs, and over 7,500 different morphs currently exist.[\[19\]\[20\]](#) Most morphs are considered solely cosmetic with no harm or benefit to the individual animal. However, the "spider" morph gene has been linked to neurological disease, specifically related to the snake's sense of balance.[\[21\]](#) Due to the ethical concerns associated with intentionally breeding a color pattern linked to genetic disease, the International Herpetological Society banned the sale of spider morphs at their events beginning in 2018.[\[22\]](#)

Eastern hognose snake

[Eastern_Hognose_Snake.jpg](#)

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Eastern hognose snake

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Squamata
Suborder:	Serpentes
Family:	Colubridae
Genus:	Heterodon
Species:	<i>H. platirhinos</i>

The **eastern hog-nosed snake**^[4] (*Heterodon platirhinos*), is a [species](#) of mildly [venomous rear-fanged snake](#) in the [family Colubridae](#). The venom is specifically adapted to [amphibian](#) prey and is harmless to humans. However, some people may have an allergic reaction, and experience local swelling and other symptoms. The species is [endemic](#) to North America.^[5] There are no

[subspecies](#) that are recognized as being valid.^[4] This species prefers habitats with sandy soils and a combination of grass fields and forest edges.^[6] They come in many different colorations and have the identifiable upturned "snout".^[7] They can be found in captivity but are a relatively difficult species to keep due to a specialized diet of toads. As with other *Heterodon* species, they have a distinctive threat reaction of first bluffing by striking with a closed mouth and then pretending to die if this fails to deter the threat.

Geographic range

H. platirhinus has a wide geographical range from the central United States to the east coast. In the northern parts of the range, it can be found in southern Ontario, southern New Hampshire, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts.^[8] Going west the snake can be found in Texas and Kansas. The southern part of the range then goes down into southern Florida.^[9] Populations start to dwindle as the species reaches the northern range.^[10]

Habitat

Studies have shown that *H. platirhinus* prefers upland sandy pine-forests, old-fields and forest edges.^[11] Like most of the genus *Heterodon*, the Eastern Hognose Snake prefers dry conditions with loose soil for burrowing purposes.^[12] These loose soils are preferable habitat components for nesting and egg laying.^[13] Barrier beach and dune ecosystems appear to contain some of the highest densities of *Heterodon platirhinus* because of abundant prey (primarily anurans from the genera *Anaxyrus*).^[14] At the northern end of their range, they have been found to prefer developed lands as their desired habitat followed by mixed forests dominated by hemlock trees.^[15] Based on a study in Canada, the average home range size is about 40 hectares.^[11] Their habitats include southeastern and midwestern woodlands, tall-grassland prairies, and grassy or cultivated fields along woodland edges.^{[16][7]} Their habitat range tends to increase with grass and leaf litter.^[17]

Description and etymology

[250px-Heterodon_platirhinusPCCA20060423-3588B.jpg](#)

North Carolina specimen

[250px-Eastern-hognose.jpg](#)

Florida specimen

[250px-Heterodon_platirhinus_head.jpg](#)

Closeup of the head of *H. platirhinus*

250px-CACO_HEPL.jpg

Cape Cod, Massachusetts, specimen

250px-Eastern_Hognose_snake%2C_crop_%285853887896%29_2.jpg

H. platirhinos playing dead.

The [generic name](#) *Heterodon* is derived from the Greek words *heteros* meaning "different" and *odon* meaning "tooth". The [specific name](#) *platirhinos* is derived from the Greek words *platys* meaning "broad or flat" and *rhinos* meaning "snout".^[18] This species of snake is described as being quite stout-bodied.^[19] The color pattern of this snake is extremely variable. It can be red, green, orange, brown, gray to black, or any combination thereof depending on locality. [Dorsally](#), it can be blotched, checkered, or patternless. The belly tends to be a solid gray, yellow, or cream-colored. In this species the underside of the tail is lighter than the belly.^[20] The most distinguishing feature is the upturned snout, used for digging in sandy soils.^[7] The average adult *H. platirhinos* measures 71 cm (28 in) in total length (including tail), with females being larger than males. The maximum recorded total length is 116 cm (46 in).^[21]

Behavior

The Eastern hognose is a [diurnal](#) species.^[7] It is typically most active during April–September after coming out of hibernation. Because there is such a wide range the snake is found there is variation in the population's climates which can cause the period of activity to change. In northern climates, hibernation comes earlier and begins late September–October whereas in southern climates, the snake might not retreat until November. There have been some recorded to still be active between December–February in Florida and along the Gulf Coast.^[6] If the temperature reaches or drops below 19 degrees Celsius, hibernation will begin for the snake. This [hibernation](#) period takes place alone in burrows either dug by the snake or already made mammal burrows. To burrow, a snake forces its head into the soil then moves its head back and forth. For hibernation, these burrows will reach depths of 25 centimeters or more.^[7]

Defensive behavior

When the eastern hognose snake is threatened, the neck is flattened and the head is raised off the ground, like a [cobra](#). It also hisses and will strike with its mouth closed, but it does not attempt to bite— a behavior known as "bluffing".^[22] The result can be likened to a high speed head-butt. If this threat display does not work to deter a would-be [predator](#), an eastern hognose snake will often roll onto its back and play dead, going so far as to emit a foul [musk](#) from its [cloaca](#) and let its tongue hang out of its [mouth](#).^{[20][23][24]} One individual was observed playing dead for 45 minutes before reanimating and moving away.^[25] This death-feigning behavior was also observed often in

water habitats.[\[26\]](#)

Feeding

The eastern hognose snake feeds extensively on [amphibians](#), and has a particular fondness for [toads](#). This snake has resistance to the [toxins](#) toads secrete. This immunity is thought to come from enlarged [adrenal glands](#) which [secrete](#) large amounts of [hormones](#) to counteract the toads' powerful skin [poisons](#). At the rear of each upper jaw, it has enlarged teeth, which are neither hollow nor grooved, with which it punctures and deflates toads to be able to swallow them whole.[\[21\]\[23\]\[27\]](#) It will also consume other amphibians, such as [frogs](#) and [salamanders](#). Like all other snakes, they eat their prey whole.[\[22\]](#) Because it is a toad feeding specialist, its venom is adapted to be effective against toads and has not been found to be harmful to humans.[\[28\]](#)

Reproduction

Eastern hognose snakes mate in early April and May. Both the male and female snakes are known to have multiple mates during this season. The act of copulation can last for up to 3 days.[\[29\]](#) Occasionally, a second breeding period occurs around September and October. Rather than fertilizing a new egg clutch at this time, females will instead store sperm until the spring months for use.[\[7\]](#) Males will follow the pheromone trails left behind by females on the move.[\[7\]\[6\]](#) Some females have been observed traveling past viable nesting conditions in order to reach communal nesting sites.[\[30\]](#) Eggs might be laid in small soil depressions, mammal burrows, or under rocks depending on the region.[\[29\]](#) The female may even dig the burrow herself, often choosing open and grassy areas with few herbs or shrubs because these areas get more sunlight, because the warm temperatures it provides are needed for the proper development of the eggs.[\[31\]](#) The females, which lay 8–40 eggs (average about 25) in June or early July, do not take care of the eggs or young. The eggs, which measure about 33 mm × 23 mm (1+1/3 in × 1 in), hatch after about 60 days, from late July to September. The hatchlings are about 16.5–21 cm (6.5–8.3 in) long.[\[24\]](#) They have an average nest temperature of 23–26 °C (73–79 °F) incubating for an average of 49–63 days.[\[13\]](#) Some parental care is shown by the female such as nest and young guarding through hissing and chasing.[\[32\]](#) Typically, males reach maturity at about 40 cm (16 in) [SVL](#) which can take up to 18-24 months. Females, however, reach maturity at about 45 cm (18 in) SVL, taking up to 21 months.[\[7\]\[6\]](#)

Venom

Heterodon platirhinos is a mildly venomous species where the effects are not deadly to humans.^[16] *Heterodon* means "different tooth", which refers to the enlarged teeth at the rear of the upper jaw. These teeth inject a mild amphibian-specific [venom](#) into prey. The fangs receive the venom from the snake's [Duvernoy's gland](#).^[33] Bitten humans who are allergic to the saliva have been known to experience local swelling, burning, discoloration, and bleeding from the wounds, but no human deaths have been documented.^[6]

Predators

There are many predators of the Eastern hognose snake. These include: tarantulas, other snakes, crows, red-tailed hawks, barred owls, raccoons, Virginia opossums, foxes, and humans.^{[7][6]}

Human impact

Humans cause pollution and pesticide poisoning, habitat destruction, vehicular deaths, and intentionally hunt the snake.^{[7][6]} Further studies have shown that other effects humans have on the mortality of *H. platirhinos* come from roads. Laura E. Robson and Gabriel Blouin-Demers conducted a study and found that the Eastern hognose snake avoids crossing paved roads, increasing the isolation of populations. The snakes will cross unpaved roads but face higher mortality from vehicle collisions.^[34]

Captivity

The hognose snake is an intermediate level reptile to keep and lives between 10-15 years in captivity. Typically, mice and rats are used to feed most snakes in captivity. With hognose being a toad specialist species, it can be tricky to get them to eat frozen thawed mice. Scenting the food with toad or lizard is a trick used amongst hobbyists to entice the snake. Being a solitary species, snakes are kept individually unless it is for intentional breeding. Due to their burrowing nature, hognose snakes require suitable substrate depth to retain this natural instinct.^[35]

Conservation status

This species, *H. platirhinos*, is classified as Least Concern (LC) on the [IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#) (Year assessed: 2007).^[36] However, it is a species of increasing conservation concern, especially in the northeastern part of its range.^{[37][38][39][40]} Of the five states in the northeast U.S.

where the eastern hognose snake occurs, it currently has "listed" conservation status in four (Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York, and Rhode Island).[\[41\]](#) Noted declines are believed to be the result of direct anthropogenic pressures including habitat loss and fragmentation, road mortality, [environmental degradation](#), and intentional killing.[\[6\]\[42\]](#) Some of this [habitat fragmentation](#) may be due to eastern hognose snakes having a reluctance to cross paved roads.[\[43\]](#) In the Eastern United States, pitch pine-scrub oak barrens are an imperiled disturbance-dependent community that has declined substantially due to wildfires that have threatened vertebrates such as the eastern hognose snake.[\[44\]](#)

Florida Kingsnake

[Lampropeltis_getula_floridana.jpg](#)

Florida Kingsnake

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Squamata
Suborder:	Serpentes
Family:	Colubridae
Genus:	Lampropeltis
Species:	L. getula
Subspecies:	<i>L. g. floridana</i>

Like other [kingsnakes](#), this species is relatively easy to care for. They should be housed in a 20-40 gallon [aquarium](#) with [aspen](#) shavings for them to burrow in. Pine shavings are toxic to reptiles. The temperature should be around 84-90 degrees during the day and Nighttime temperatures should range between 68 and 75 degrees. Like other snakes, they should feed on pinkie or fuzzie [mice](#) as babies, then gradually increase in size until the snake reaches adulthood, which by then they should be eating large mice.[\[1\]](#)

Terrarium Size

When it comes to choosing a terrarium for pet reptiles, keep in mind that larger is always better! Florida kingsnakes need plenty of room to stretch out and explore, and they are likely to quickly get bored in small or sparse enclosures, particularly if your snake is a male. The minimum enclosure size recommended for housing one Florida kingsnake is 48" L x 24" W x 24" H, but larger is recommended if you have the space for it!

Because kingsnakes are snake-eaters, multiple kingsnakes should not be housed in the same enclosure.

Lighting

Florida kingsnakes are primarily diurnal (active during the day), so it's particularly beneficial to provide plenty of light during the daytime to help support their mental health. Although they are capable of surviving without UVB lighting, it's best practice to include it as part of the snake's setup so it can still reap the benefits. Our goal as good reptile keepers is not to simply allow our pets to survive — it is to do everything in our power to enable them to thrive. And there is mounting scientific evidence that UVB is, in fact, beneficial to kingsnakes and other species.

Therefore we recommend installing an Arcadia T5 HO Forest 6% or Zoo Med T5 HO Reptisun 5.0 in a reflective fixture, long enough to cover about 1/2 of the enclosure's length and placed next to the heat lamps. So for a 48" long enclosure, you will want a bulb about 22" long. Do not use other brands — when it comes to UVB, *brand matters!*

If your enclosure has a mesh top, it's best to install the UVB fixture on top of the enclosure. If it does not, it's best to also install a mesh lamp guard such as the Arcadia LampGuardPro over it so the snake can't come in direct contact with the bulb. The closest distance between a Florida kingsnake and its UVB lamp (basking distance) should be between 9-11", as UVB intensity varies with distance from the bulb.

Heating

Because kingsnakes are reptiles, they need a range of temperatures within their enclosure so they can regulate their own body temperature as needed. Areas of heat speed up their metabolism and promote activities like digestion and healing. Cool areas slow the metabolism and promote activities like rest and energy conservation.

Your Florida kingsnake's basking area should be around 90°F, and the cool side should be between 75-84°F. Create a basking area by placing a platform or sturdy log below the lamps. Heating equipment should be turned off at night so temperatures can drop during this time.

Many kingsnake keepers will recommend using heat pads as the snake's primary source of heat, but heat pads don't work well in a bioactive enclosure. Instead, use a couple of heat bulbs like the 50w Arcadia Halogen Basking Spot in small dome heat lamps. Plug each heat lamp into a lamp dimmer or dimming thermostat so you can control them if they get too hot.

To monitor the temperatures in your snake's enclosure, place on digital probe thermometer in the basking area, and another on the floor of the cool end.

Humidity

Florida kingsnakes prefer a moist, tropical habitat, so they need humid conditions within their enclosure to enjoy optimal health. Shoot for average humidity levels between 70-80%, ranging lower during the day and higher at night. You can maintain proper humidity by spraying the enclosure 2x/a day. If needed, run a reptile humidifier in the enclosure at night.

Your kingsnake should also have access to a humid hideout at all times. This hide should be placed on the cool half of the enclosure and lined with moistened sphagnum moss or substrate.

Don't forget to water your plants as needed! Fortunately, having a bioactive setup makes it easier to maintain humidity levels that are appropriate to a Florida kingsnake's needs.

Substrate

To create a Florida kingsnake vivarium, you will need a bioactive-compatible substrate. That means things like aspen shavings or bark chips aren't going to work. You need a soil-like mix that mimics the conditions of your snake's natural habitat. You can make your own with a base of 60% plain topsoil and 40% coconut fiber mixed with sphagnum moss, leaf litter, and Bio Dude Bio Shot soil inoculant.

Alternatively, you can let The Bio Dude do the work for you with the Terra Fauna Bioactive Kit!

Finally, in order to make the substrate functional, make sure to add tropical CUC organisms like powder blue/orange isopods and springtails. You can also add other species like super worms, earthworms, and even a small millipede!

Decorating the Enclosure

Enclosure décor is more than just making your setup look nice. It's also an important part of providing *environmental enrichment* to your kingsnake, which enhances your pet's quality of life by providing opportunities to express natural behaviors, explore, and exercise. In other words, décor is not optional — it's just as important as the other equipment mentioned in this care sheet for creating a functional reptile enclosure!

Here are some ideas for ways that you can decorate and enrich your kingsnake's bioactive enclosure:

- hollow logs
- bark flats
- hides/caves
- plants
- sheet moss
- décor

Florida kingsnakes like to hide in plant litter, so it's a good idea to give them a thick layer of leaf litter and/or hay on top of the substrate to burrow around in.

Feeding Your Florida Kingsnake

Kingsnakes are obligate carnivores, which means that they *must* eat whole animals to get the nutrition they need. There is no replacement. Here is a rough sketch of how much and how often you should be feeding your snake, based on age:

- Hatchlings should be fed once every 5-7 days.
- Juveniles should be fed once every 7-10 days.
- Adults should be fed once every 10-14 days.

An appropriately-sized meal should be slightly larger than the snake at its widest point, or about 10% of its weight.

Always feed your snake inside its enclosure, not outside. Contrary to the myth, feeding inside does not make snakes more aggressive. However, use feeding tweezers to offer the prey, not your hand, to prevent accidental bites.

Variety is essential to complete nutrition. Aside from the usual mice and rats, you can add variety to your snake's diet with hamsters, gerbils, chicks, quail, anoles, house geckos, and Reptilinks. If

you have the opportunity to offer your kingsnake an appropriately-sized, captive-bred snake as a feeder, do it! However, do not offer live prey if it can be avoided. Frozen feeders should be completely thawed to 75-100°F before offering.

Handling Tips

After bringing your new pet home, do not handle it until it is eaten regularly. This can take anywhere from two weeks to two months, so be patient and use this time to make sure your husbandry is on point. Once your snake is ready for handling, handle it at least 1-2x weekly to keep it accustomed to you, but no more than once daily. Handling is also a good way to encourage your snake to exercise and provide additional enrichment!

Wash Your Hands First

Before you pick up your snake, first wash your hands with soap or hand sanitizer. This removes potentially harmful bacteria, viruses, or parasites from your hands, as well as makes your hands smell distinctly inedible. Kingsnakes are very enthusiastic predators, so if your hand smells like food, it might get treated like food.

How to Pick Up a Snake

Next, use a paper towel roll to tap its head (gently). This sets expectations by letting the snake know that it's time for handling, not food. Pick it up with two hands, one behind the head and one supporting the rest of the body. NEVER pick up a snake by its tail — this can really hurt their spine!

Safety with Snakes

Always supervise children closely when they are handling a pet snake (or any kind of pet, frankly). This is as much for the snake's safety as it is for the child's. Keep the snake's head away from your face, and always wash your hands and arms with soap or hand sanitizer after handling.

DO NOT Handle If...

Don't handle your snake within 48 hours of a meal, as this can stress them out and lead to regurgitation, which is a traumatic experience that can actually lead to death. Also do not handle if your pet's eyes have turned opaque or cloudy. This means that the snake is preparing to shed and can't see well, making them more jumpy than usual and more likely to bite out of self-defense.

Corn Snake (*Pantherophis guttatus*)

[CornSnake.jpg](#)

[Status_iucn3.1_LC.svg.webp](#)

Corn Snake (*Pantherophis guttatus*)

Domain:	Eukaryota
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Squamata
Suborder:	Serpentes
Family:	Colubridae
Genus:	Pantherophis

Species:

P. guttatus

The **corn snake** (*Pantherophis guttatus*), sometimes called **red rat snake**, is a [species](#) of [North American rat snake](#) in the [family Colubridae](#). The species subdues its small prey by [constriction](#).^{[4][5]} It is found throughout the southeastern and central [United States](#). Though superficially resembling the venomous copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*) and often killed as a result of this mistaken identity, the corn snake lacks functional [venom](#) and is harmless. The corn snake is beneficial to humans^[6] because it helps to control populations of wild rodent pests that damage crops and spread disease.^[7]

The corn snake is named for the species' regular presence near grain stores, where it preys on mice and rats that eat harvested corn ([maize](#)).^[8] The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this usage as far back as 1675, whilst other sources maintain that the corn snake is so-named because the distinctive, nearly-checked pattern of the snake's belly scales resembles the kernels of variegated corn.^{[9][10]}

The corn snake is also referred to as a red rat snake.^[11]

Description

As an adult the corn snake may have a total length (including tail) of 61–182 cm (2.00–5.97 ft).^[12] In the wild, it usually lives around ten to fifteen years, but in captivity can live to an age of 23 years or more.^[13] The record for the oldest corn snake in captivity was 32 years and 3 months.^[14] The natural corn snake is usually orange or brown bodied with large red blotches outlined in black down their backs.^[15] The belly has distinctive rows of alternating black and white marks.^[16] This black and white checker pattern is similar to Indian corn which is where the name corn snake may have come from.^[17] The corn snake can be distinguished from a copperhead by the corn snake's brighter colors, slender build, slim head, round pupils, and lack of heat-sensing pits.^[18]

Taxonomy

Until 2002, the corn snake was considered to have two [subspecies](#): the [nominate subspecies](#) (*P. g. guttatus*) described here and the [Great Plains rat snake](#) (*P. g. emoryi*). The latter has since been split off as its own species (*P. emoryi*), but is still occasionally treated as a subspecies of the corn snake by hobbyists.

P. guttatus has been suggested to be split into three species: the corn snake (*P. guttatus*), the Great Plains rat snake (*P. emoryi*, corresponding with the subspecies *P. g. emoryi*), and [Slowinski's](#)

[corn snake](#) (*P. slowinskii*, occurring in western Louisiana and adjacent Texas).[19]

P. guttatus was previously placed in the genus [Elaphe](#), but *Elaphe* was found to be [paraphyletic](#) by [Utiger](#) et al., leading to placement of this species in the genus *Pantherophis*.^[20] The placement of *P. guttatus* and several related species in *Pantherophis* rather than in *Elaphe* has been confirmed by further phylogenetic studies.^{[21][22]} Many reference materials still use the [synonym](#) *Elaphe guttata*.^[23] Molecular data have shown that the corn snake is actually more closely related to [kingsnakes](#) (genus *Lampropeltis*) than it is to the Old World rat snakes (genus *Elaphe*) with which it was formerly classified. The corn snake has even been bred in captivity with the [California kingsnake](#) (*Lampropeltis californiae*) to produce fertile hybrids known as "jungle corn snakes".^[24]

Range

Natural habitat

In the wild, the corn snake prefers [habitats](#) such as overgrown fields, forest openings, trees, palmetto flatwoods, and abandoned or seldom-used buildings and farms, from sea level to as high as 6,000 ft (1,800 m). Typically, the corn snake remains on the ground until the age of four months but can ascend trees, cliffs, and other elevated surfaces.^[25] It can be found in the [Southeastern United States](#) ranging from [New Jersey](#) to the [Florida Keys](#).

In colder regions, the corn snake [brumates](#) during winter. However, in the more temperate climate along the coast, it shelters in rock crevices and logs during cold weather. It also can find shelter in small, closed spaces, such as under a house, and come out on warm days to soak up the heat of the sun. During cold weather, the corn snake is less active so it hunts less.^{[26][27]}

Introduced range

Often called the "American corn snake", *P. guttatus* is a proscribed pest in much of [Australia](#). There are active extermination campaigns and advice for the public in [Victoria](#),^[28] [New South Wales](#),^[29] and [Queensland](#).^[30]

Reproduction

It has been found that corn snakes (along with other colubrids) reach sexual maturity by means of size, as opposed to age. [\[31\]](#)

[220px-Okeetee_corn_snake.jpg](#)

Young Okeetee Phase corn snake

[220px-Corn_Snake_eggs.jpg](#)

Baby corn snakes hatching from their eggs

Corn snakes are relatively easy to breed. Although not necessary, they are usually put through a cooling (also known as brumation) period that takes 60–90 days to get them ready for breeding. Corn snakes brumate around 10 to 16 °C (50 to 61 °F) in a place where they cannot be disturbed and with little sunlight.^{[[citation needed](#)]}

Corn snakes usually [breed](#) shortly after the winter cooling. The male courts the female primarily with tactile and chemical cues, then everts one of his [hemipenes](#), inserts it into the female, and ejaculates his [sperm](#). If the female is [ovulating](#), the eggs will be fertilized and she will begin sequestering nutrients into the eggs, then secreting a shell.^{[[citation needed](#)]}

Egg-laying occurs slightly more than a month after mating, with 12–24 eggs deposited into a warm, moist, hidden location. Once laid, the adult snake abandons the eggs and does not return to them. The eggs are oblong with leathery, flexible shells. About 10 weeks after laying, the young snakes use a specialized scale called an [egg tooth](#) to slice slits in the egg shell, from which they emerge at about 5 in (13 cm) long.[\[32\]](#)

Reproduction in captivity has to be done correctly so the clutch's mortality rate decreases. This includes accurate sexing, establishing proper pre-breeding conditioning, and timely pairing of adults. Corn snakes are temperate zone colubrids, and share a reproductive pattern where females increase their feeding during summer and fall. This only applies to corn snakes that are sexually mature, which typically indicates the snake is around 75 cm (30 inches) in length or weight 250 g. [\[33\]](#)

Diet

[220px-Corn_snake_eating_baby_mouse.jpg](#)

Captive corn snake eating young mouse

Like all snakes, corn snakes are carnivorous and, in the wild, they eat every few days. While most corn snakes eat small [rodents](#), such as the [white-footed mouse](#), they may also eat other reptiles, or [amphibians](#), or climb trees to find unguarded [bird eggs](#).[\[34\]](#)

Seasons play a large role in the thermal regulation patterns of corn snakes, which is the main mechanism of digestion for snakes. During fall, corn snakes maintain a body temperature

approximately 3 degrees Celsius higher than the surrounding environment after consuming a meal, [35] while corn snakes in the winter are not seen to thermoregulate after digestion. Captive snakes do this by using heat mats as an underneath heat source replicates their natural conditions. Corn snakes demonstrate nocturnal patterns, and use the warm ground at night to thermoregulate, therefore heat mats replicate this source. [citation needed]

American "rat snakes", such as *P. guttatus*, had venomous ancestors, which lost their venom after they evolved [constriction](#) as a means of prey capture. [citation needed]

Intelligence and behavior

Like many species of the [Colubridae](#), corn snakes exhibit defensive [tail vibration](#) behavior. [36] Behavioral / chemosensory studies with corn snakes suggest that odor cues are of primary importance for prey detection, whereas visual cues are of secondary importance. [37][38]

However; a study conducted by Dr. David Holzman of the University of Rochester in 1999 found that snakes' cognitive abilities (in specific regards to spatial learning) actually rival that of birds and rodents. [39] Holzman challenged the typical testing method that was being used by biologists to examine snakes' navigational abilities, claiming the structure of the arena itself was biologically in favor of rodents. He hypothesized that if the typical arena being used to test the animals was modified to cater to snake's [innate](#) biologically driven goals, thus providing them with problem sets that they would likely encounter in their natural environment, this would give a more accurate view of their [intelligence](#).

The study involved testing 24 captive-bred corn snakes, placing them in a wide-open tub with walls too high for them to climb out. Eight holes were cut out underneath, with one hole leading to a shelter. An intense light was positioned to shine directly on the arena, exploiting the snake's natural aversion to bright open spaces. This provided a biologically meaningful objective for the snakes: to seek out cozy dark shelter.

Not only did they find that, when given proper incentive, the snakes exhibited an acute ability to learn and navigate their surroundings, they also found snakes rely on their sense of [vision](#) much more than many [herpetologists](#) had previously assumed. They did, however, find that younger snakes were able to more quickly locate the holes than older snakes, as the younger snakes were more resourceful in their application of senses - where the older snakes more heavily relied on their sense of sight. [40]

In captivity

Corn snakes are one of the most popular types of snakes to keep in captivity or as pets, second only to the [ball python](#). They are the most popular pet snake in Brazil.^[*citation needed*] Their size, calm temperament, and ease of care contribute to this popularity. Captive corn snakes tolerate being handled by their owners, even for extended periods.^[41]

Variations

[220px-Young_corn_snake%2C_Nevis.JPG](#)

A docile young corn snake (an introduced species) captured from the wild on the island of [Nevis](#), West Indies, in 2009

After many generations of [selective breeding](#), captive bred corn snakes are found in a wide variety of different colors and patterns. These result from recombining the [dominant](#) and [recessive genes](#) that code for proteins involved in [chromatophore](#) development, maintenance, or function. New variations, or morphs, become available every year as breeders gain a better understanding of the [genetics](#) involved.

Color morphs

- **Normal / Carolina / Wildtype** – Orange with black lines around red-colored saddle markings going down their back and with black-and-white checkered bellies. Regional diversity is found in wild-caught corn snakes, the most popular being the Miami and Okeetee Phases. These are the most commonly seen corn snakes.
- **Miami Phase** (originates in the Florida Wildtype) – Usually smaller corn snakes with some specimens having highly contrasting light silver to gray ground color with red or orange saddle markings surrounded in black. Selective breeding has lightened the ground color and darkened the saddle marks. The "Miami" name is now considered an appearance trait.
- **Okeetee Phase** – Characterized by deep red dorsal saddle marks, surrounded by very black borders on a bright orange ground color. As with the Miami Phase, selective breeding has changed the term "Okeetee" to an appearance rather than a locality. Some on the market originate solely from selectively breeding corn snakes from the Okeetee Hunt Club.
- **Candy-cane** (selectively bred [amelanistic](#)) – Amelanistic corn snakes, bred toward the ideal of red or orange saddle marks on a white background. Some were produced using light Creamsicle (an amel hybrid from Great Plains rat snake x corn snake crosses) bred with Miami Phase corn snakes. Some Candy-canes will develop orange coloration around the neck region as they mature and many labeled as Candy-canes later develop significant amounts of yellow or orange in the ground color. The contrast they have as hatchlings often fades with maturity.

- **Reverse Okeetee** (selectively bred amelanistic) – An amelanistic Okeetee Phase corn snake, which has the normal black rings around the saddle marks replaced with wide white rings. Ideal specimens are high contrast snakes with light orange to yellow background and dark orange/red saddles. Note: An **Albino Okeetee** is not a locale-specific Okeetee—it is a selectively bred amelanistic.
- **Fluorescent Orange** (selectively bred amelanistic) – A designer amelanistic corn snake that develops white borders around bright red saddle marks as adults on an orange background.
- **Sunglow** (selectively bred amelanistic) – Another designer amelanistic corn snake that lacks the usual white speckling that often appears in most albinos and selected for exceptionally bright ground color. The orange background surrounds dark orange saddle marks.
- **Blood Red** (selectively bred "diffused") – Carry a recessive trait (known as diffused) that eliminates the ventral checkered patterns. These originated from a somewhat unicolor Jacksonville, Florida and Gainesville, Florida strain of corn snake. Through selective breeding, an almost solid ground color has been produced. Hatchlings have a visible pattern that can fade as they mature into a solid orange-red to ash-red colored snake. The earlier Blood Red corn snakes tended to have large clutches of smaller than average eggs that produce hard-to-feed offspring, though this is no longer the case.
- **Crimson** (Hypomelanistic + Miami) – Very light high contrast corn snakes, with a light background and dark red/orange saddle marks.
- **Anerythristic** (anerythristic type A, sometimes called "Black Albino") – The complement to [amelanism](#). The inherited recessive mutation of lacking erythrin (red, yellow and orange) pigments produces a corn snake that is mostly black, gray and brown. When mature, many anerythristic type A corn snakes develop yellow on their neck regions, which is a result of the carotenoids in their diet.

[220px-Anerycorn.JPG](#)

An anerythristic corn snake

- **Charcoal** (sometimes known as anerythristic type B) – Can lack the yellow color pigment usually found in all corn snakes. They are a more muted contrast compared to Anerythristics.
- **Caramel** – Another Rich Zuchowski-engineered corn snake. The background is varying shades of yellow to yellow-brown. Dorsal saddle marks vary from caramel yellow to brown and chocolate brown.
- **Lavender** – Have a light pink background with darker purple-gray markings. They also have ruby- to burgundy-colored eyes.
- **Cinder** – Originated with Upper Keys corn snakes and, as such, are often built slimmer than most other morphs. They may resemble anerythristics, but they have wavy borders around their saddles.
- **Kastanie** – Hatch out looking nearly anerythristic, but gain some color as they mature, to eventually take on a chestnut coloration. This gene was first discovered in Germany.
- **Hypomelanistic** (or **Hypo** for short) – Carry a recessive trait that reduces the dark pigments, causing the reds, whites and oranges to become more vivid. Their eyes remain dark. They range in appearance between amelanistic corn snakes to normal corn snakes

with greatly reduced melanin.

- **Ultra** – A hypomelanistic-like gene that is an allele to the amelanistic gene. Ultra corn snakes have light gray lines in place of black. The Ultra gene is derived from the [gray rat snake](#) (*Pantherophis spiloides*). All Ultra and Ultramel corn snakes have some amount of gray rat snake in them.
- **Ultramel** – An intermediate appearance between Ultra and amel, which is the result of being [heterozygous](#) for Ultra and amel at the albino locus.
- **Dilute** – Another melanin-reducing gene in which the corn snake looks as if it is getting ready to shed.
- **Sunkissed** – A hypo-like gene which was first found in Kathy Love's corn snake colony.
- **Lava** – An extreme hypo-like gene which was discovered by Joe Pierce and named by Jeff Mohr. What would normally be black pigment in these corn snakes is, instead, a grayish-purple.

Pattern morphs

[220px-Amelanistic_Stripe_Corn_Snake.jpg](#)

Amelanistic striped corn snake

- **Motley** – Has a clear belly and an "inverted" spotting pattern. May also appear as stripes or dashes.
- **Striped** – This morph also has a clear belly and a striping pattern. Unlike the Motley corn snake, the striped corn snake's colors will not connect, but may sometimes break up and take on a "cubed" appearance. Cubes and spots on a striped corn snake are the same as the saddle color on a similar-looking normal corn snake, unlike Motley corn snakes. Striped is both allelic and recessive to Motley, so breeding a striped corn snake and a (homozygous) Motley corn snake will result in all-Motley corn snakes and then breeding the (heterozygous) Motley corn snake offspring will result in $\frac{3}{4}$ Motley corn snakes and $\frac{1}{4}$ striped corn snakes.
- **Diffused** – Diffuses the patterning on the sides and eliminates the belly pattern. It is one component of the Blood Red morph.
- **Sunkissed** – While considered a hypo-like gene, sunkissed corn snakes also have other effects, such as rounded saddles and unusual head patterns.
- **Aztec**, **Zigzag** and **Banded** – Selectively bred multigenetic morphs that are not dependent on a single gene.

Compound morphs

There are tens of thousands of possible compound morphs. Some of the most popular ones are listed here.

- **Snow** (amelanistic + Anerythristic) – As hatchlings, this color variation is composed of white and pink blotches. These corn snakes are predominantly white and tend to have

yellow neck and throat regions when mature (due to carotenoid retention in their diet). Light blotches and background colors have subtle shades of beige, ivory, pink, green or yellow.

- **Blizzard** (amelanistic + Charcoal) - Totally white with red eyes, with very little to no visible pattern.
- **Ghost** (Hypomelanistic + Anerythristic type A) - Exhibit varying shades of grays and browns on a lighter background. These often create pastel colors in lavenders, pinks, oranges and tans.
- **Phantom** - A combination of Charcoal and Hypomelanistic.
- **Pewter** (Charcoal + Diffused) - Silvery-lavender, with very little pattern as adults.
- **Butter** (amelanistic + Caramel) - A two-tone yellow corn snake.
- **Amber** (Hypomelanistic + Caramel) - Have amber-colored markings on a light brown background.

[220px-Corn_Snake_opal.jpg](#)

Opal corn snake

- **Plasma** (Diffused + Lavender) - Hatch out in varying shades of grayish-purple.
- **Opal** (amelanistic + Lavender) - Look like Blizzard corn snakes once mature, with pink to purple highlights.
- **Granite** (Diffused + Anerythristic) - Tend to be varying shades of gray as adults, with males often having pink highlights.
- **Fire** (amelanistic + Diffused) - An albino version of the Diffused morph. These corn snakes are typically very bright red snakes, with very little pattern as adults.

Scale mutations

- **Scaleless** corn snakes are homozygous for a recessive mutation of the gene responsible for scale development. While not completely scaleless above, some do have fewer scales than others. However, all of them possess ventral (belly) scales. They can also be produced with any of the aforementioned color morphs. The first Scaleless corn snakes originated from the cross of another North American rat snake species to a corn snake and they are therefore, technically, hybrids. Scaleless mutants of many other snake species have also been documented in the wild.

Hybrids

Hybrids between corn snakes and any other snake is very common in captivity, but rarely occurs in the wild. Hybrids within the genera [Pantherophis](#), [Lampropeltis](#), or [Pituophis](#) so far have been proven to be completely fertile.

Many different corn snake hybrids are bred in captivity. A few common examples include:

- **Jungle** corn snakes are hybrids between a corn snake and a [California kingsnake](#) (*Lampropeltis californiae*). These show extreme pattern variations, taking markings from both parents. Although they are [hybrids](#) of different genera, they are not sterile.
- **Tri-color Jungle** corn snakes are hybrids between a Querétaro [kingsnake](#) and a corn snake. The color is similar to that of an amelanistic corn snake.
- **Creamsicle** corn snakes are hybrids between an albino corn snake and a Great Plains rat snake (*P. emoryi*). The first-generation hybrids are known as "Rootbeers". Breeding these back to each other can produce Creamsicles.
- **Turbo** corn snakes are hybrids between a corn snake and any [Pituophis](#) species.
- Corn snakes hybridized with milk snakes are called a variety of names, depending on the subspecies of milk snake used. For example, a Honduran milk snake × corn snake is called a **Cornduran**, a Sinaloan milk snake × corn snake is called a **Sinacorn** and a Pueblan milk snake × corn snake is called a **Pueblacorn**.
- **Brook Korn** corn snakes are hybrids between a Brook's kingsnake and a corn snake. Like the jungle corn snake, these hybrids also show extreme pattern variations.

When hybrids of corn snakes are found in the wild, they have usually hybridized with other *Pantherophis* species whose ranges overlap with corn snakes.