



Portsmouth Reptile & Amphibian Society
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P.R.A.S Care sheet No 17



Common Name: Russian Rat Snake, Amur Rat snake

Scientific Name: *Elaphe anomala*

Care Difficulty: Moderate- not recommended as a first time snake.

Distribution: Central Asia, from Southern Siberia to China and Korea.

Description:

The Russian rat snake is the more common of the two species that is captive bred and seen for sale. It is also the more stunning of the two animals, having a shiny black back ground with white or yellow narrow bands. The Amur rat snake is much more subtle in its brown livery.

Size: Both species reach a maximum of 1.5m (5') and are generally placid animals.

Housing:

These snakes are medium sized as hatchlings measuring 25-30cm (10-12"). For the first year they can be kept in a small vivarium about 30x30x30cm (1x1x1') or an adequate sized plastic storage box. Adults can be maintained in a vivarium 90x45x45cm (3x1.5x1.5').

Temperature should be kept at about 25-28°C (77-82°F) in spring and summer during the day and a few degrees less at night. These temperatures should be provided across a temperature gradient.

For breeding purposes winter temperature should be 7-14°C (45-57°F). Heating can be achieved by the provision of a heat mat (only cover up to half the surface area of the bottom to allow the snake a temperature gradient), heat cable or ceramic heater, all of which must be attached to a thermostat.

Any bulbs or ceramic heaters should have a guard around them to prevent your snake

from burning itself.

The vivarium can be furnished with a variety of substrates such as wood shavings, wood chip, bark chippings or paper. Make sure that any wood chippings/ shavings do not contain any cedar, as this is toxic to snakes. A hide should be provided in both the warm and cool ends to give added security for the snake; this can be a fancy piece of ceramics, a plant pot, or something as simple as cardboard box.

These snakes love to climb, so adding a couple of branches or things to climb on will be greatly appreciated by your snake. A water bowl large enough for your snake to soak in should be provided as well.

Slight misting of the vivarium may be beneficial when the snake is preparing to shed.

Diet and Feeding:

These snakes eat rodents. They should be fed the appropriate size and quantity of food for their size. Hatchlings should initially be fed a small 'pinkie' (newborn mouse) every 4 - 7 days; this should be increased to 2 -3 pinkies offered over the same time period. As the snake grows the size and number of items can be increased. Never be tempted to over feed your snake. It may lead to an intestinal prolapse or an obese snake (gaps of skin between the scales). Obese snakes tend not to breed. Fat deposits can stop the hemipenes from inverting to allow breeding to occur. Plus fat deposits on the vital organs will shorten the snakes' life. Occasionally Russian Rat snakes will prefer large quantities of a small food item to fewer large items. They may regurgitate large items; this is not uncommon, just keep to smaller food items.

Breeding:

To achieve the best success rate for breeding it is advisable to drop the temperature to 7-14°C (45-57°F), for several months. November to February are often the chosen months for many breeders. 2-3 weeks before brumation, you should stop feeding your snake to make sure that its gut is empty. The temperatures can be reduced over a week or so.

Mating in the spring occurs mainly after the female has shed her skin, and exudes powerful pheromones. The male may not eat up to the point of successful mating.

Eggs can often be seen towards the rear third of the female and are laid a month to sixty days after mating. The snake should shed her skin about 10-12 days before laying her eggs and will need somewhere to deposit them. An ice cream tub with the lid on and a hole cut in the side filled with damp moss or vermiculite makes an ideal lay box. Depending on the species the snakes lay from between 4 to 15 eggs. When incubated at 28°C (82°C) in dampened vermiculite (equal weight vermiculite to boiling water and allowed to cool). Hatchlings will appear from 55 -70 days.

References:

Image of Russian Rat Snake taken from: <http://snakeroom.pl/weze-wlaciwe.html>
03.04.2010