



# RED-TAILED BOA

SQUAMATA  
Family: Boidae  
Genus: *Boa*  
Species: *constrictor*



**Range:** Northern Mexico through Central America into South America

**Habitat:** wide variety – tropical rainforests to arid semi-desert

**Niche:** nocturnal, semi-arboreal, carnivorous

**Wild diet:** small mammals (prefer bats) and birds

**Zoo diet:** mice and rats

**Life Span:** 20 wild, 25 – 30 years captivity

**Sexual dimorphism:** females generally being larger in both length and girth than males

**Location in SF Zoo:** South American Tropical Rainforest and Aviary

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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The Boa Constrictor is a nonvenomous constrictor with a heavy-bodied snake having coloring that varies greatly depending on the locality; they match the habitat where they live so they can blend in. Generally a boa constrictor is brown, grey or cream base color and patterned with brown or reddish brown saddle-shaped bands that become more pronounced towards the tail. The head is arrow-shaped with distinctive stripes on it. One runs dorsally from the snout to the back of the head. The lateral strips start as a dark triangle between the snout and the eye and slant downward towards the jaw. The coloring provides effective camouflage in the jungles and forests in their natural range.

Boa constrictors lack the heat-sensitive pits that larger members of the Boidae Family possess, but have heat-sensitive scales to locate its prey. Boa constrictors possess pelvic spurs, which are hind leg remnants found on either side of the cloacal opening. They are used by males in courtship and are larger in males than in females. Males possess hemipenes, a double-penis, of which only one side is commonly used in mating. They have a good sense of smell aided by a vomeronasal organ and good vision. In addition, they can detect both vibrations in the ground and sound vibrations through the air through their jawbones.

Boa constrictors have rows of recurved teeth, which are continuously replaced; they have no fangs. They grab and hold prey while they wrap their muscular bodies around their victim, squeezing until it suffocates. Their jaws can stretch wide to swallow large prey whole. Boa constrictors have two functional lungs, a condition found in boas and pythons.

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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All Boa constrictors fall under CITES; most boa constrictors are on CITES Appendix 2, while *B. c. occidentalis* is on Appendix 1. Boa constrictors are very popular within the exotic pet trade and they are hunted for their colorful skin.

<b>Weight:</b> 20 – 30 lbs
<b>Length:</b> M 6 – 8 ft F 7 – 10 ft
<b>Width:</b>

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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Boa constrictors are most often observed in trees or on the ground near streams and rivers; they are excellent swimmers, but prefer to stay on dry land. Young spend more time in the trees; as they grow larger and heavier they become primarily terrestrial. They are generally solitary, and only come together during mating season. They are nocturnal; however, they may bask during the day when night-time temperatures are too low. Boa constrictors defend territories that change over time. Territories may be abandoned if resources or conditions decline.

The boa will first strike at the prey, grabbing it with its teeth; it then proceeds to constrict the prey until death before consuming it whole.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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Boa constrictors are seasonal breeders. When female boa constrictors are ready to mate, their body gives off a smell, which attracts male boa constrictors.

During breeding season the female boa will emit a scent from her cloaca to attract males, who may then wrestle for the right to breed with her. Males may mate with multiple females. Fertilization is internal, with mating facilitated by the pelvic spurs of the males. Males may mate with more than one female; females may also have more than one mate in a season. Most female boa constrictors do not appear to reproduce annually. Usually about half of the female population is reproductive each year and only when they are in good physical condition.

Boa constrictors are ovoviviparous; females give birth to live young. The young are independent at birth and will grow rapidly for the first few years. As a boa grows, and its skin is shed, its coloration may gradually change. Young snakes tend to have brighter colors and more contrast between colors.

Incubation: 5 – 8 mos # of young: ~ 25 (range 10 – 64)	Sexual Maturity: Weight at birth: 3.5 oz Length at birth: 15 – 20 in
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## MISCELLANEOUS

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Currently there are at least 9 recognized subspecies. All subspecies are referred to as "Boa constrictors", while the nominate subspecies, *B. c. constrictor*, is often referred to specifically as the "red-tailed boa". The species *Boa constrictor* is divided into many subspecies. These subspecies are highly variable and over the years the taxonomy has changed.

Boas are considered primitive snakes possessing vestigial pelvis girdles and hindlimbs.

### Sources:

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Living Snakes of the World, © 1987, John M. Mehrtens, Sterling Publishing Co.

Boas and Pythons of the World, © 2007, Mark O'Shea, Princeton

[http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Boa\\_constrictor/](http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Boa_constrictor/)

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