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Corn Snake Care

Basic Information

The corn snake is a constrictor ranging from the Southern East coast to West to Texas and Mexico. There are a couple of theories as to how the corn snake got its name. One theory is that the black and white markings on the belly resemble Indian corn or maize. The other is that farmers once thought that they ate corn due to their presence in cornfields.

Corn snakes' habitat includes forests, fields, rocky hillsides, wetlands, farmyards, and similar terrains. They are most active in the evenings. They range in length from 2-6 feet, with the average being about 4 feet. They may live up to 20 years or more with proper care. These snakes are docile, easy to care for and make very good pets.

Diet

In the wild, corn snakes eat mice, rats, bats, and birds. In captivity, they do quite well on a diet of mice and/or rats. Hatchling corn snakes can be started out on pinkies (new born mice) that are 3 – 4 days old. If you are planning on maintaining the snake on a diet of pinkies for an extended time, you may want to coat the pinkies with calcium that does not contain vitamin D₃. Once they start eating, they can be moved up to fuzzies, hoppers, adult mice and so on up to adult rats, if they indeed reach an adequate size to consume them. It is generally recommended feeding mice and rats that have been frozen for at least thirty days. This prevents your pet from being bitten, contracting parasites, and spreading bacteria the prey may carry. However, this is not as crucial when feeding pinkies.

Young snakes should be fed every 4-5 days. As they reach maturity, they may be cut back to every 10-14 days. When feeding, keep your snake's activity in mind. A sedentary snake does not need to be fed as much as a very active snake.

Housing

Housing your snake may be as complex or as simple as you'd like it to be. Keep in mind how much effort you want to put into maintaining the enclosure. For most corn snakes, a large aquarium will do well. Newspaper, Astroturf, or towels make a nice bedding material. You may use pine shavings for a more natural look, but this will require more time to clean adequately. If you choose to use pine shavings, feed your snake in a separate tank lined with one of the other beddings. This should help prevent the ingestion of the shavings, which may lead to impactions. In addition to bedding, fresh water should be available at all times as well as a place to hide. Corn snakes like to hide, so don't be surprised if they spend a great deal of time out of sight.



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You may add branches, rocks, and other items to enhance the appearance of the cage, but they are not necessary. Having a rock in the cage will aid the snake when shedding.

The temperature of the cage should range from 75 – 85 degrees Fahrenheit. Place a thermometer at each end of the cage to make sure that the temperature stays in this range. Do not estimate or assume cage temperature. This range can be achieved in some regions just by leaving the cage at room temperature. In other cases, it may be necessary to put a basking light at one end of the cage or place a heating pad under the one end of the cage. Caution should be taken when using a heating pad. The snake should never have direct contact with it. It should be set only on low, and should only be under a portion of the cage, not all of it. In the wild, the corn snake will hibernate in the fall and winter months. This period can be replicated in captivity if desired and needed, if your intention is to breed your snake. The snake should not be feed for 2-3 weeks prior to the start of its hibernation. Water should still be available during hibernation. The temperature should be lowered to between 50-60 degrees Fahrenheit over a week's time. Keep them in hibernation for 6-8 weeks. Do not feed during this time. Your snake will not eat and may become dinner if live food is fed. At the end of the period, you can bring your snake back up to warmer temperatures over a day or two.

The humidity in the cage should be such that the snake doesn't have problems shedding without condensation on the walls of the cage. No special lights are required other than one to provide thermal and photoperiod regulation.

Signs of sickness

Snakes are very good at hiding disease and in many cases the owner doesn't know something is wrong until too late. The major sign of sickness is anorexia. Other signs are vomiting, regurgitation, diarrhea, and behavioral changes.

One common problem that may be encountered is parasites. Pet owners can most often see mites and ticks. Mites are very small and appear as little black dots walking on your snake. They are more easily seen on a white background such as a white towel or paper. They can kill a snake in large numbers. You should contact your veterinarian on how to get rid of them. Ticks may be more difficult to see than mites. They fit in under the scales and blend in nicely. Running your hand down your snake feeling for any little bump may help find ticks. Ticks are removed with tweezers or forceps, followed by cleaning the bite area. Your snake may also have intestinal parasites. Your veterinarian can identify these on a fecal exam. Signs of intestinal parasites include failure to grow, loss of weight despite eating well, and diarrhea.

Snakes in general are prone to respiratory infections. Signs of this condition include foaming or bubbling around the mouth, open mouth breathing, and anorexia. This is not a complete list of signs. If you feel your pet is not doing right, contact your veterinarian.



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