



Rosy Boas

Lichanura trivirgata

BEGINNER · 2–4 FT ADULT · 20–30 YR LIFESPAN · CREPUSCULAR · SOUTHWESTERN US

A snake built for rock piles and patience. Striped, slow-moving, and about as gentle as snakes get, the rosy boa is a small, heavy-bodied desert native of the American Southwest. Keepers love them because they ask so little: modest housing, simple meals, decades of company. The honest catch is dryness. This is an arid-country animal, and damp conditions are the fastest way to ruin one.

AT A GLANCE

Difficulty	Beginner
Adult size	2–4 ft
Lifespan	20–30 years
Ambient temp	78–85 °F (68–74 °F night)
Basking spot	88–92 °F
Humidity	30–40%
UVB	Low output, beneficial
Diet	Frozen/thawed mice
Feeding cadence	Every 7–10 days



Locality is the story here: captive-bred rosy boas at NARBC shows span cream and rose to deep orange, all in the species' three-stripe pattern.

Photo: Robb Hannawacker, while working for Joshua Tree National Park / Wikimedia Commons · Public domain

01

Temperament & Handling

If a snake can be called mellow, it's this one. Rosy boas move at their own unhurried pace and tolerate calm handling as well as any species in the hobby. Defensive bites are genuinely rare: a startled rosy is likelier to tuck its head into its coils than strike. Move slowly, support the whole body, and skip handling for a couple of days after meals. They earn their beginner label.

02

Housing by Life Stage

A rosy boa's whole world is at ground level, so the table below trades height for footprint at every stage. Growth is unhurried; plan on three to four years from newborn to adult quarters. Racks are workable through subadult, though adults do better with the full 36×18 floor. House one snake per enclosure, as with nearly all snakes, and make whatever you choose escape-proof: rosies are patient, methodical push-and-probe artists, and they'll find any gap you leave them.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Newborn	12×8×6	16×8×8	Live-bearing species (no eggs); neonates arrive fully independent.
Juvenile	16×8×8	20×12×12	Docile and slow-moving from the start.
Subadult	20×12×12	24×18×12	Slow grower. Expect 3–4 years to reach adult size.
Adult	24×18×12	36×18×12	Most stay 2–3 ft. Dry desert setup; one of the best beginner boas.

Enclosure sizes from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Treat minimums as the floor, preferred as the goal.

03

Heat & Light

Run daytime ambients at 78–85 °F with an 88–92 °F basking surface, and let everything fall to 68–74 °F at night. This species is built for a real desert drop. Overhead halogen or a deep-heat projector works well; heat tape in racks is fine too. Either way, the source runs on a thermostat, no exceptions. Lighting stays simple: a steady day/night cycle, plus low-output UVB (genuinely beneficial here, though not strictly required).

04

Humidity & Water

Target 30–40% humidity, which in most homes means doing nothing, and that's the point. **Keep this snake dry.** Chronic dampness is the rosy boa's one real enemy, behind most of the respiratory and scale troubles the species ever sees. Water stays minimal: a small dish on the cool end, refreshed often, in an enclosure that's ventilated rather than sealed. If humidity creeps anyway, shrink the dish before you reach for anything else. During shed, offer a humid hide rather than misting. Targeted moisture, not damp air.

05

Substrate & Enrichment

Aspen, the workhorse substrate, holds burrows, stays dry, and makes spot-cleaning easy. A firm sand-and-soil desert mix works for naturalistic setups; skip pure loose sand and anything moisture-holding like coco fiber or cypress. Give three or four inches to tunnel through, because rosies are burrowers by trade. Furnish like the habitat: low rock piles stacked so they can't shift, a hide at each end of the gradient, and enough clutter that the snake can cross the floor unseen.

06

Feeding

Mice, frozen/thawed, every 7–10 days. That's the entire menu for life. Match prey to the snake's thickest point and feed with tongs; rosies have a more enthusiastic strike than their gentle reputation suggests. The real discipline is restraint: a desert metabolism plus an eager appetite is how rosy boas end up obese, and lean animals live longest. Expect many adults to refuse food through the cooler months. That winter fast is normal here. Judge by the scale, not the calendar.

07

Health Red Flags

Nearly everything wrong with a rosy traces to moisture, so learn the damp-setup signs: wheezing or open-mouth breathing, nostril bubbles, and pink, raised, or blistered belly scales. Any of those means dry the enclosure today and book a reptile vet. Blister disease and respiratory infections escalate fast. Know a normal winter fast from trouble: a fasting rosy holding its weight is fine; one losing weight or regurgitating a meal needs a vet, not another week of watching.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual - when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.