

HOGNOSE SNAKE CARE

Hognose snakes originate from North and South America and Madagascar. They can be between 35-100 cm (14-40 inches) fully grown, the females tend to be larger than males. They can live for up to 20 years in captivity. These include:

Heterodon, which occur mainly in the United States and northern Mexico

Leioheterodon, the hognose snakes native to the Madagascar and
Xenodon (formerly *Lystrophis*), the South American hognose snakes.

The North American *Heterodon* species are known for their habit of thanatosis: playing dead when threatened



HOUSING

- As large a vivarium as possible should be provided to enable room for exercise, and a thermal gradient to be created along the length of the tank. Wooden or fibreglass vivaria are ideal as this provides the snake with some visual security and ventilation can be provided at snake level. We recommend a minimum vivarium size of 36"x18"x18" to allow snakes to stretch appropriately.
- Good ventilation is required and additional ventilation holes may need to be created.
- Hides are required to provide some security. Artificial plants, cardboard boxes, plant pots, logs or commercially available hides can be used. They should be placed both at the warm and cooler ends of the tank.
- There are a number of commercially available substrates available for snakes including aspen, orchid bark, wood chip and cyprus mulch. Care should be taken not to feed your snake directly on the substrate to avoid accidental ingestion and blockages. Newspaper or paper towels are easy to maintain and can work well in the short-term. However, they do not allow for natural behaviours so for longer term housing, it is worth considering more natural substrate types.
- The vivarium should be spot cleaned as soon as any waste appears to help prevent disease and fully cleaned once a month with a reptile safe disinfectant.



Western hognose *H. nasicus nasicus*

TEMPERATURES AND HUMIDITY

- Reptiles depend on external heat sources to regulate their body temperature, so supplementary heating is required to create a temperature range.
- Typically a basking area is created using a light emitting spot/ceramic heat emitting bulb, providing a basking temperature of ~30-32°C. This should be kept on all day and turned off at night.
- Background heat can be provided with a heat mat (on the back wall) a tubular heater, a heat plate or a ceramic bulb. This should be set on a thermostat so that the overnight temperature does not drop below ~20-25°C.
- Heat sources should be guarded to prevent thermal burns (see separate handout on heating for reptiles).
- Temperatures should be measured with a maximum/minimum digital thermometer. These can be obtained cheaply online. During the cold winter months careful checking is required to ensure the heat sources are keeping the tank sufficiently warm.
- Humidity should be checked with a hygrometer and kept low. The Eastern and Southern sub-species prefer a slightly higher humidity – between 50-60% - it helps to keep a water bowl in the warm end of the vivarium. The Western species prefer 40-50% and so the water bowl should be in the cool end.

LIGHTING

- Hognose snakes are a diurnal species (active in the day) and benefit from UV-b light.
- Various UV lamps are available (see separate handout on lighting for reptiles), but for hognose snakes a lamp with a low-medium output (e.g. 6%) should be used to mimic the sunlight they would be exposed to in their wild environment.
- This will need to be on all day for 12 hours and at an appropriate distance from the snake as recommended by the manufacturer. A small branch or rock can be placed below the basking site (please ask for further information on UV light in reptiles).
- All UV-b bulbs should be checked regularly for their UV output and should be changed at least as frequently as manufacturer's instructions.

WHAT TO FEED

- Hognose snakes are carnivores and their main diet consists of pinkie mice for hatchlings. As the snake grows, so will the frequency & amount of food given and an increase in prey size, from pinkie mice to large mice when fully grown. As a general guide one mouse per week is sufficient for a 500 gram snake. Food should be defrosted and warmed to blood temperature 37°C prior to feeding.
- Water should always be available and a container is required which will allow the snake to submerge completely. This should be changed daily.

COMPANIONS

- In general the happiest snake is the solitary snake.

SALMONELLA

- All reptiles can potentially carry Salmonella.
- However it is rarely a cause of illness in reptiles and treatment is not required.
- It can be transmitted to people (especially young children or those who are immuno-compromised) so good hygiene after handling the reptile is important. Generally washing your hands in soap is sufficient. There are commercially available disinfectants that can be used as an alternative.



Tricolor hognose *Xenodon pulcher*

ANNUAL HEALTH CHECKS

We recommend annual health checks every year for pet reptiles as medical problems are more easily treated if detected at an early stage – **you can register for automatic reminders**

INSURANCE

We highly recommend that you take out a pet insurance policy. For a monthly fee your pet can receive the best treatment at an affordable cost. There is normally an excess to pay for each condition then after that costs are covered up to a set limit. Once you have the policy, please provide us with a copy of your insurance details. There are a lot of different companies and policies available and we suggest you contact a number of them for information- we have a leaflet advising what to look out for. Our advice is to choose a policy which provides cover for chronic illness for the life of your pet. If this policy is too much for you then the best cover you can afford will provide piece of mind in an accident or emergency.



Leioheterodon modestus Blonde or golden hognose