

# Cornsnake

***(Pantherophis [Elaphe] guttata guttata)***

## **Native Range:**

The Cornsnake (*E. g. guttata*) is found in the south-eastern United States, from Florida westward to Louisiana. There they inhabit heavily forested coastal regions. Another subspecies, known as Emory's Rat Snake (*E. g. emoryi*) is found from Louisiana through Texas and north to south-eastern Colorado and Kansas. From southern and western Texas, a recently described subspecies inhabits rocky desert areas southward in to Mexico. It is the Mexican Cornsnake (*E. g. meahllmorum*). Two other previously recognized subspecies are no longer considered valid, but they are being maintained in pure form by a number of dedicated hobbyists. The form '*intermontana*' (now synonymized with *E. g. emoryi*), is from central western Colorado and adjacent Utah. Known as the Rosy Rat Snake, *E. g. rosacea* (now synonymised with *E. g. guttata*) is found at the very tip of southern Florida and the Florida Keys.

## **Size:**

Approximately eight to ten inches long at birth, they average three to four feet in length as adults. Occasional specimens may attain five feet in length, and there are a few records of six-foot specimens.

## **Handling:**

Cornsnakes rarely attempt to bite, although they may do so if restrained. Handle gently, without pinching or squeezing, allowing the snake to move through your fingers. Do not allow the snake to dangle unsupported.

## **Caging:**

Any 'typical' snake cage can be used, with a fifteen or twenty gallon aquarium being adequate for an adult. Hatchlings are sensitive to dehydration and do best in small 'Critter Keeper' cages or plastic shoe boxes.

## **Substrate:**

A variety of substrates can be used. Aspen bedding, newspaper, and Care Fresh are popular with many keepers. Paper towels may be used for lining baby cages. Keep the substrate clean and dry at all times. As with all reptiles, do NOT use cedar or pine shavings. These items are toxic to reptiles.

## **Food:**

Most Cornsnakes will be fed a diet of mice throughout their lives. Hatchlings usually feed readily on newborn 'pinkie' mice, and should be fed about every five to seven days. Increase the size of the meal as the snake grows. One or two adult mice are sufficient every ten or fourteen days to maintain even the largest adult. An occasional stubborn hatchling will require a pinkie scented with lizard smell (*Anolis* sp. are best) before accepting it. More rarely, it will refuse anything but the lizard itself. After a few lizards, it will usually begin to feed on 'scented' pinkies, and then on to plain ones. Be patient. Often, hatchling Cornsnakes feel 'lost' or insecure when placed in a large cage. These animals will often feed readily if left overnight in a small deli cup with a pinkie and a folded paper towel to hide under.

### **Humidity & Water:**

Provide clean water in a small dish. Humidity should be kept low, or respiratory problems can result. Due to the variance in cages and home environments, some snakes may experience shedding problems, particularly the tail tip. If this is noticed, provide a small plastic container with lid (cut an access hole in the side) filled with damp sphagnum moss. This will allow the animal to shed properly. Stuck sheds may harden and constrict the blood flow to the tail, causing loss of the tail tip. Many shedding problems can be rectified if noticed quickly simply by placing the snake in a small deli cup overnight with a wet paper towel. Place the cup in a suitable location in the cage.

### **Heating & Lighting:**

Provide a thermal gradient by placing a heat pad under one end of the cage. This should allow the snake to choose from higher temperatures (about 90-95F) at the warm end, and cooler temperatures (about 78-83F) at the cooler end. Provide suitable hiding areas at both warm and cool areas, so the snake can feel secure at any temperature. Temperatures below 75F should be avoided. No special lighting is required for these nocturnal animals.

### **Reproduction:**

Although examining the shape of the tail can sometimes determine sex, many adult snakes can only be accurately sexed by 'probing'. Hatchlings can be sexed by manually everting the hemipenes (a process known as 'popping'). Probing or popping should only be performed by an experienced individual, as improper technique may result in severe damage or even death. Most specimens will require brumation (hibernation) to breed, but some Cornsnakes readily reproduce under normal conditions. Typical clutches consist of about fifteen eggs, although clutches of up to thirty are recorded. Incubation takes from 55 to 60 days, at an average temperature of 81F.

### **Colour and Pattern Phases:**

Natural colour variants include: Normal, Miami, Okeetee, and the various subspecies. Pattern variants include: Striped, Motley, Striped Motley, Zig-Zag, and Patternless. These traits may be combined with innumerable genetic colour variants to create more colour morphs and pattern variations than could be listed here. Popular forms include: Red Albino, Black Albino, Charcoal, Candy Cane, Albino Okeetee, Snow, Blizzard, Sunglow, Pastel, Ghost, Butter, Lavender, Caramel, Creamsicle, Butter, Blood-Red, Cotton Candy, and a host of others. A full-scale breeding operation to maintain and create all of these varieties (and many not yet created) would consist of several hundred breeders, and would take a lifetime to assemble. Many dedicated hobbyists have done just that.