## **YVCipedia REPTILE**

Red-Tailed Boa Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

“Red-tailed boa” is a common name for several large **Boa constrictor subspecies**, especially the **Boa constrictor constrictor** (true red-tail) and **Boa constrictor imperator** (often also labeled “red-tail” in the pet trade). These **large, muscular, non-venomous constrictors** are native to Central and South America.

Red-tailed boas are famous for their **striking saddle-like patterns**, reddish tail markings, and **calm, deliberate demeanor**. While often docile when socialized, they are **strong, large snakes** that require **serious commitment**, space, and respect.

Adults typically reach **6–10+ feet** in length, depending on subspecies and locality. Lifespans of **20–30+ years** are common with proper husbandry.

## **Housing & Environment**

Red-tailed boas need **spacious, secure enclosures** that accommodate their size, strength, and need for environmental gradients.

**Minimum enclosure sizes:**

* Juveniles: 20–40 gallon tank (temporary only)
* Adults: At least **6×2×2 ft**, with **8×3×3 ft** or larger recommended for very large individuals

**Key enclosure features:**

* Escape-proof doors or lids (boas are strong, inquisitive, and heavy)
* Multiple secure hides on both warm and cool sides
* Sturdy climbing branches or low platforms (especially for juveniles)
* Easy-to-clean, durable construction to handle large, heavy-bodied snakes

**Recommended substrates:**

* Cypress mulch
* Coconut husk
* Newspaper or paper-based bedding for easy maintenance
* Avoid cedar or pine shavings (toxic oils)

**Cleaning guidelines:**

* Spot-clean feces and urates as needed
* Full substrate changes and disinfection monthly or as needed

## **Heating & Lighting**

Boas are **ectothermic** and require carefully maintained **temperature gradients** for digestion and overall health.

**Temperature gradient:**

* **Basking area:** 88–92°F
* **Ambient daytime:** 78–85°F
* **Cooler side:** 75–80°F
* **Nighttime:** Safe to drop to ~70–75°F

**Heating:**

* Overhead ceramic heat emitters or halogen basking bulbs (on thermostats or dimmers)
* Under-tank heat mats controlled by thermostats for belly heat
* Avoid heat rocks (burn risk)

**Lighting:**

* UVB is **not required**, but **low-level UVB (2–5%) may support health**
* Provide a **12-hour light/dark cycle** with timers to mimic natural rhythms

## **Humidity**

Red-tailed boas need **moderate humidity** levels of **50–70%**, depending on your local climate and the subspecies.

**Humidity management tips:**

* Light misting if needed
* Large water basin helps maintain ambient humidity
* Provide a **humid hide** with damp sphagnum moss for shedding support
* Use **digital hygrometers** to monitor accuracy

Proper humidity is essential to support **healthy skin and complete shedding**.

## **Water & Hydration**

Fresh, clean water should always be available in a **large, stable basin**.

**Water care guidelines:**

* Choose a container large enough for partial or full-body soaking (many boas will soak before sheds)
* Change water daily or if soiled
* Clean and disinfect the water basin weekly or as needed
* Monitor for bacterial growth in standing water

## **Diet & Feeding**

Red-tailed boas are **strict carnivores** that eat whole prey. Captive boas are usually fed **appropriately sized frozen/thawed rodents**, with larger adults sometimes taking rabbits.

**Feeding guidelines:**

* Prey size ≈ 1–1.5× the widest part of the snake’s body
* Juveniles: Every 7–10 days
* Adults: Every 14–28 days depending on size and age

**Feeding tips:**

* Always feed **appropriately thawed, never live** prey to prevent injuries
* Use feeding tongs to offer prey safely
* Avoid handling for **48–72 hours after feeding** to reduce regurgitation risk
* Monitor body condition to avoid obesity—adult boas don’t need frequent feeding

## **Behavior & Handling**

Red-tailed boas are known for their **generally calm, deliberate temperament** when socialized. However, they are **powerful snakes** that require respect.

**Handling recommendations:**

* Always support the entire body and tail
* For large adults, **use a second person for safe handling**
* Approach calmly, avoiding sudden movements
* Start with short, positive sessions to build trust
* Avoid handling right after feeding or during shedding cycles

Safe handling is **essential** to protect both the keeper and the snake.

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Schedule an **initial veterinary exam** after acquisition and plan for **annual wellness checkups** with a reptile-experienced veterinarian.

**Common health issues:**

* Respiratory infections (from incorrect temperatures or humidity)
* Mouth rot (infectious stomatitis)
* External parasites (mites)
* Internal parasites (especially in wild-caught or imported animals)
* Obesity from overfeeding or poor diet
* Inclusion Body Disease (IBD, especially in mixed constrictor collections)

**Warning signs:**

* Lethargy or weakness
* Persistent refusal to eat
* Wheezing, open-mouth breathing, nasal discharge
* Swollen jaw or mouth lesions
* Abnormal or incomplete sheds
* Regurgitation, especially repeated events

Prompt veterinary care **prevents complications** and supports long-term health.

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Red-tailed boas **benefit greatly from well-designed, enriched enclosures** that allow natural behaviors.

**Enrichment strategies:**

* Multiple secure hides for thermoregulation and security
* Large water basin for soaking
* Sturdy branches or low platforms for climbing (especially for juveniles)
* Substrate that allows limited burrowing or shaping
* Periodic rearrangement of décor to encourage exploration
* Naturalistic elements like cork bark, logs, and rocks

A well-designed enclosure supports **physical and mental health**, reducing stress and promoting natural behaviors.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Named for their **reddish tail markings**, most pronounced in **true Boa constrictor constrictor** localities.
* Non-venomous **constrictors**, subduing prey by wrapping and squeezing.
* Native to **Central and South America**, with many local variations in size and color.
* Often docile with handling but **extremely strong**, requiring safe handling protocols.
* Lifespan of **20–30+ years** in captivity with proper care.

### **Supplies & Care Checklist**

* Escape-proof enclosure (≥6×2×2 ft minimum for adults)
* Thermostats for all heat sources
* Digital thermometers and hygrometers
* Ceramic heat emitters or halogen basking bulbs
* Under-tank heat mats if suitable
* Multiple secure hides (warm and cool sides)
* Large, stable water basin for soaking
* Appropriate substrate (cypress mulch, coconut husk, newspaper)
* Humid hide with damp moss for shedding support
* Feeding tongs for safe prey offering
* Frozen/thawed appropriately sized rodents or rabbits
* Cleaning supplies and reptile-safe disinfectants
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*