



Milksnakes

Lampropeltis triangulum

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Milksnakes, also known as scarlet kingsnakes, natural habitat ranges from Southeast Canada to South America. Their habitat overlaps with that of the venomous coral snake. Milksnakes use mimicry as a natural defense mechanism, with the same color of stripes, also called triads, as coral snakes. There is an old adage using the colors of adjacent stripes to differentiate the two: “Red next to yellow is a deadly fellow. Red next to black is a friend of Jack”. Captive bred snakes are often healthier, have fewer parasites, and are much easier to tame. Adults can reach anywhere from 2 to 6 feet in length, depending on the subspecies. The most common subspecies seen as pets do not typically get over 32 inches in length.

Health care: Snakes can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend a physical exam, CBC, chemistries, and fecal float yearly and for new snakes. Weighing your pet at home can be a good way to catch illnesses early. Please bring them in to see us if their weight changes by 10%, or more. Common problems are anorexia(not eating), cancer, intestinal obstruction, constipation, stomatitis (mouth rot), incorrect husbandry, upper respiratory problems, pneumonia, and intestinal parasites. Remember with any disease processes, the sooner we see the animal, the more successful we are at treating them!

Husbandry: Avoid handling new snakes until they have eaten at least once. Keep only one snake per enclosure. Milksnakes eat other snakes! House in 20 gallon or larger enclosure. Newspaper or indoor-outdoor carpeting should be used as a substrate. Do not use cedar, walnut or pine bedding as the strong smell and oils in these woods can be irritating. The dust of most wood shavings can cause problems in snakes and often dehydrate reptiles. Shavings can also be swallowed while the snake is eating and cause GI obstructions. A dark tight hiding place should be provided for security. Snakes should always have fresh water available in a dish that cannot be tipped over. The temperature should range from 85-88°F in the warm end of the cage to 78-80°F in the cool end during the day, dropping down to 71-75F at night. Use a digital thermometer to monitor. A heat lamp should be used and set off to one side to give the enclosure a temperature gradient. Do not use hot rocks as they can easily cause thermal burns.

Diet: These snakes do fine being fed one appropriately sized meal every 1-2 weeks. It is better to feed

More on the back!

smaller items but in greater numbers, than something too big. Appropriate meal items include pre-killed rodents. Live rodents can bite and severely wound snakes. If a snake goes off feed there is always a reason for it. Some snakes have decreased appetite during hibernation season, regardless of the temperature or during the breeding season. Females will usually stop eating if they are gravid. Consult a veterinarian if your snake skips more than 2 meals.

Shedding: Occurs as the snake increases in size, in adults usually every 2-4 months. Usually the eyes will cloud over several days before they shed, and at this time an otherwise gentle snake can become aggressive due to decreased vision and likely discomfort. Do not feed them at this time. The shed should come off in one or two pieces. Problems occur in animals with low humidity. A common problem with this is retained eye caps, or spectacles. We do not recommend you try to remove them, as the corneas of the eyes are easily damaged this way. Please schedule an appointment with your veterinarian if this problem occurs. Always check the shed to make sure the eye caps and the end of the tail are with it.

Sexing: Done by a veterinarian or an experienced herpetologist using a probe, which if done improperly provides an incorrect sexing and can hurt the animal.

