



African House Snakes

Boaedon spp. (*B. capensis*)

BEGINNER • 2–3.5 FT ADULT • 10–15 YR LIFESPAN • NOCTURNAL • SOUTHERN AFRICA

The beginner snake that lives in the ball python's shadow. African house snakes are small, hardy colubrids that hunt rodents at night across savanna, fynbos, and semi-arid grassland. They live out their lives in a four-foot enclosure, they eat with an enthusiasm that borders on rude, and they rarely give a keeper trouble. The honest catch is the flip side of that appetite: a house snake at feeding time is all business, so use tongs and mean it.

AT A GLANCE

Difficulty	Beginner
Ambient temp	75–85 °F
Basking surface	85–90 °F
Night temp	68–72 °F
Humidity	40–60%
UVB	Not required
Diet	Mice; every 5–7 days
Adult size	2–3.5 ft (females larger)
Lifespan	10–15 years



Captive-bred African house snakes are a fixture on NARBC breeder tables, sometimes still labeled by the old genus name, Lamprophis.

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01

Temperament & Handling

House snakes are as easygoing as small colubrids get. Adults handle calmly, and most settle within a session or two. The catch is the feeding response, which is superb and not especially discriminating: a warm hand entering the tub can read as dinner. That is a food mistake, not aggression, and it costs nothing once you use a hook or tongs to shift the snake out first. Hatchlings can be jumpy and may musk; both fade with calm, regular handling.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Think floor, not height. Every stage wants a horizontal footprint, a hide at each end so the snake can pick a temperature without giving up cover, and a lid that latches. House snakes are strong, persistent escape artists; a gap you can slide a pencil through is a gap. **Keep them one to an enclosure: this genus will eat other snakes, including its own kind.** Racks suit them well through the growing years.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	12×8×6	16×8×8	Feeds hard from day one; seal every gap, hatchlings escape through nothing.
Juvenile	16×12×8	20×12×12	Docile and easy to handle; keep sessions short and away from feeding time.
Subadult	24×18×12	36×18×12	Moderate growth; upgrade on the animal's size, not the calendar.
Adult	36×18×12	48×18×18	Females 3–4 ft, males smaller; a rack works only if the footprint is real.

Habitat-OS life-stage guidance, benchmarked on the Cape house snake (*Boaedon capensis*). Floor space matters more than height.

03

Heat & Light

Run a gradient: 75–85 °F ambient, a warm surface of 85–90 °F at one end, and nights down to 68–72 °F. An overhead heat source on a thermostat gets you there, and the thermostat is not optional; heaters fail hot eventually. Never a heat rock. UVB is not required for this nocturnal species, though a regular day/night light cycle is worth keeping. Read surface temps with a probe or an infrared gun, not the dial on the controller.

04

Humidity & Water

These are savanna and semi-arid grassland animals, and they want it drier than most keepers expect: 40–60% suits them year-round. A water bowl large enough to soak in, refreshed a few times a week, plus real ventilation covers it. If a shed comes off in pieces, don't soak the whole enclosure; offer a humid hide packed with damp sphagnum and let the snake decide. Wet, stale substrate is how a hardy snake ends up with a scale infection.

05

Substrate and Cover

Aspen, cypress mulch, or a coco-husk blend all work. Pick one deep enough to hold a burrow, because house snakes tunnel, and skip loose sand entirely; for young snakes it's a real impaction risk. Cover matters more than decor: hides at both ends, a slab of cork bark, leaf litter, and a branch for the occasional climb. A cluttered enclosure is a confident snake. Spot-clean as you go and strip the whole thing down monthly.

06

Feeding

This is where house snakes earn their reputation. Mice cover the whole diet, and few snakes take them more willingly: hatchlings start on pinky mice and adults work up to adult mice, at one meal every 5–7 days throughout. Frozen/thawed is the standard, warmed through and offered on tongs. Let the snake come to the prey instead of reaching past it. A refused meal is worth noticing here, because refusing food is not this species' habit.

07

Health Red Flags

In a snake this reliable, appetite is the loudest signal. A sustained refusal or a regurgitated meal points at temperature, stress, or illness. Watch too for retained eye caps after a shed, black specks moving in the water bowl (mites), yellow or blistered belly scales from damp bedding, and open-mouth breathing or bubbling at the nose. Any breathing sign, a second regurgitation, or steady weight loss is a reptile-vet visit, not a wait-and-see.

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.