



Sand Boas

Eryx & Gongylophis spp.

BEGINNER · 15–24 IN ADULT · NOCTURNAL · BURROWER · E. AFRICA & S. ASIA

Sand boas are chunky, gentle little burrowers that live most of their lives an inch below the surface. The Kenyan sand boa is the common starter: females reach two feet and a satisfying heft, males stay hand-sized around 15 inches. They ask for very little (a low tub, deep bedding, a warm end) and reward you at night, when the substrate starts to move.

AT A GLANCE	
Ambient (day)	78–85 °F
Basking surface	90–95 °F
Night	72–76 °F
Humidity	30–40%
UVB	Not required
Diet	Pinky to hopper mice
Feeding cadence	Every 7–10 days
Adult size	15–24 in
Representative	Kenyan sand boa



Kenyan sand boa, the species most keepers start with. Females dwarf the males.

Photo: Stephanie Dolrenny / iNaturalist · CC BY-SA

01

Temperament & Handling

Sand boas are among the most docile snakes in the hobby, and bites are rare outside of a feeding mix-up. Dig one out gently (never grab the tail end you can see and pull) and it will lie calmly in your hands. Just know what you're buying: this is a pet you appreciate on its terms, mostly after dark. They are burrowers, not display animals.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Think long and low: a sand boa uses floor area, not height. Ventilation matters more than it looks. These are arid-zone snakes that do poorly in stagnant, humid air, so screen tops and ventilated tubs are ideal. A flat stone or cork slab on the surface gives the snake something to ambush from under.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	12×8×6	16×8×6	Born live and tiny; deep substrate from day one.
Juvenile	16×12×6	20×12×8	Expect to see the snake about 10% of the time.
Subadult	20×12×8	24×18×8	Females pull ahead of males quickly.
Adult	36×18×8	48×18×12	Long and low beats tall: floor space is everything.

Enclosure sizes in inches, L×W×H. Habitat-OS life-stage guidance.

03

Heat

Warm end 90–95 °F at the surface, ambient high 70s to mid 80s, night drop to the low-to-mid 70s. Because the snake lives under the bedding, what matters is the temperature down at the floor: put the thermostat probe at substrate level on the warm end and verify with a temp gun.

04

Humidity & Water

Keep it dry: 30–40% is the target, and chronically damp bedding is the fastest way to make a sand boa sick. A small, shallow, tip-proof water dish is enough; they drink rarely. Around shed time, a brief bump from a light misting or a humid hide helps the skin come off clean.

05

Substrate & burrows

Despite the name, pure sand is a poor burrow medium. It's heavy and collapses. Four to six inches of aspen shavings holds tunnel structure beautifully; sandy soil mixes also work. No cedar, ever. Expect the snake to pick a home burrow near the warm end and reuse it.

06

Feeding

Prey runs smaller than you'd guess: pinkies for babies up through hoppers or small adult mice for big females, every 7–10 days. Feed with long tongs, wiggling warmed frozen/thawed prey at the surface. The ambush strike is instant. Tong-feeding also keeps the snake from swallowing a mouthful of bedding with dinner.

07

Health Red Flags

A sand boa that surfaces and stays surfaced is telling you something, usually that the substrate is too wet or too hot down below. Watch for retained shed rings on the tail tip, scale rot (brown, weeping belly scales) from damp bedding, and wheezing from chronic humidity. Winter food refusal in adult males is normal breeding-season behavior; track weight rather than panicking.

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.