

GUIDE TO CARING FOR CORN SNAKES



Corn snakes are a species of rat snake originating from eastern United States, and are the most popular snake species kept as pets.

CLEANING AND WATERING

Corn Snakes should be provided with a non-tip water bowl that is large enough for the snake to submerge in, especially when shedding its skin. This should be washed and cleaned regularly. Clean drinking water should be available at all times.

Vivariums should be spot-cleaned as soon as droppings are produced and disinfected with a pet-safe disinfectant occasionally. Soiled substrate should be safely disposed of and replaced with fresh.

HANDLING

Corn Snakes seldom bite but they need time and patience to become accustomed to gentle handling. The snake should be held loosely and supported at the middle and rear of the body, and the handler's movements should be slow and deliberate.

Avoid handling a Corn Snake before, during, or shortly after feeding, or when the odour of its food is on your hands. Doing so may result in it mistaking your finger for food, or may cause it to regurgitate its last meal.

Remember to always wash your hands before and after handling snakes. Never attempt to handle a snake until it has settled down and is feeding regularly.

Reptiles can carry a form of Salmonella and this can be transferred to humans. Good hygiene and hand-washing after handling should be sufficient to prevent any risk of infection.

PET CODE OF PRACTICE

Never release a pet (companion animal) into the wild. It is illegal and for most species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death, as they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment. This includes the need to properly dispose of soiled substrate, so that eggs and live food can't escape into the wild.

SHOPPING LIST

- vivarium
- water bowl
- heat mat/heat lamp
- substrate
- thermostat
- hides
- thermometers
- thermostat
- branches
- frozen mice/baby rats
- pet-safe disinfectant
- Corn Snake care book



THE FIVE ANIMAL WELFARE NEEDS

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 means all pet owners have a legal duty of care to their pets. Anyone who is cruel to an animal or is found not to be providing the five animal welfare needs, as listed below, can be fined and sent to prison.

- 1 Environment:** pets should be given the correct housing according to its size, this includes shelter, space to exercise and a secure, comfortable place to rest.
- 2 Diet:** pets should be offered the correct type and volume of food to cover all their nutritional needs alongside access to clean, fresh water.
- 3 Behaviour:** all pets should be allowed to exhibit normal behaviour patterns and should be provided with the facilities to do so.
- 4 Company:** some animals require the company of their own kind, whilst others should be kept on their own.
- 5 Health:** all animals should be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease, and given veterinary treatment if they become sick or injured.



This leaflet is produced by The Pet Charity, a national charity which promotes the joy and benefits of pet ownership.

To show your support for The Pet Charity please visit our JustGiving donation page at:
www.justgiving.com/thepetcharity



These organisations support the aims of The Pet Charity to promote the welfare and responsible keeping of pet animals.



The Pet Charity
www.thepetcharity.org.uk
info@thepetcharity.org.uk
Registered charity no: 1052488

Copyright © 2014, 2019 The Pet Charity. All rights reserved.

THE PET CHARITY GUIDE TO CARING FOR CORN SNAKES

Adults are medium in size, easy to feed and can withstand a large temperature range. They are generally good natured and therefore ideal as a first snake or for an experienced hobbyist. They come in a vast and ever-increasing array of colour morphs and, will almost definitely, have been captive-bred.

The Corn Snake's habitat varies from open woodlands to rocky hillsides and the length of an adult varies from 75cm to 200cm. Their average life span is approximately 15 – 20 years.

CHOOSING YOUR CORN SNAKE

Good health is indicated by the snake being alert and inquisitive, usually through extensive tongue flicking in new situations. Your snake should also feel strong rather than flaccid in your hands. Good condition is indicated by a body cross-section that is more rounded than angular and the skin should appear taut and shiny. A dull or dry appearance, with visible folds along the body may indicate a health issue.

The vent area should be clean and free of any encrustation, indicative of diarrhoea. The body should be symmetrical, clean, and free of swelling, unless recently fed.

There should be no discharge from the nostrils and the mouth should be tightly closed.

HOUSING

A well ventilated, adequately heated, escape-proof vivarium is the best housing for your Corn Snake. For an adult snake the vivarium should be at least two thirds the length of the snake – preferably larger if you have space – and allow freedom of movement. Young snakes may be kept in a smaller housing which can make feeding and maintenance easier, then moved into larger accommodation as they grow. The gaps between sliding glass doors should not be sufficient to allow a hatchling to squeeze through.

Corn snakes are not social animals and are best kept singularly.

FURNISHINGS

There are many floor substrates suitable for Corn Snakes. Ask your pet shop about the most suitable substrate for your pet.

It is essential to provide your pet with places to hide and feel secure, and these should be located in both the cooler and hotter ends of the vivarium. Pieces of cork bark make great shelters and piles of rocks, securely positioned slates and other such furnishings will also be appreciated.

Ensure that the substrate under at least one hide is always relatively moist, as this will facilitate better skin-shedding.

DID YOU KNOW?

Handling before, during, or after feeding, or when the odour of food is on your hands, may result in your finger being mistaken for food.



TEMPERATURE

All reptiles are cold blooded, so they need an external heat source to maintain their body temperature. One end of the vivarium should be heated to create a thermal gradient, allowing the snake to choose its preferred temperature. The ideal thermal gradient is 24 – 25°C at the cool end and 30 – 34°C at the hot end. Night temperature can be dropped by several degrees at both ends and this will benefit your pet as it reflects his natural environment. A cooler winter period can also be beneficial.

Background heat can be provided by using heat mats. These should cover no more than 50% of the wall or floor area and should ideally be wall mounted. If used on the floor, great care must be taken to ensure the mat is not thermally insulated by deep substrate or décor, as this can be a fire risk. More intense heat can be provided by using spot lights or heat lamps. All heat sources should be guarded to prevent burning and must be controlled using a suitable thermostat. Your pet shop can advise on suitable heating and temperature control products.

Thermometers should be placed at each end of the vivarium to monitor the temperature range and the maximum temperature of the heat gradient.

LIGHTING

UVB light is not considered essential for Corn Snakes, but they are likely to benefit from the provision of UVB.

FOOD AND WATER

Corn snakes are carnivores and feed principally on mice or rats, which they consume whole. The food offered should be no larger than a maximum of one and a half times the diameter of the snake's mid-body. Young snakes can be fed once or twice per week and adults fed every 7 – 14 days. Adults may fast for many weeks during the breeding season.

In order to avoid stomach upsets and vomiting, frozen food needs to be carefully thawed and warmed to blood temperature before offering. Ideally defrosting it in a fridge overnight before warming and feeding the next day. Food should not be defrosted in a microwave or in hot water. Please see the REPTA guidance leaflet for more information.

HEALTH

Corn Snakes are robust animals and have few major health issues. If you have any concerns about your pet then you should consult a specialist vet.

- **Regurgitation:** this can be caused by the environmental temperature being too low, or by some diseases. Consult a vet if you are getting repeated regurgitations.
- **Parasites:** captive-bred Corn Snakes will rarely have internal parasites. Snake mites are common and live on the skin of the snake as well as in the vivarium. They feed by sucking blood. Mites can be treated using specific treatments available for your pet store or vet.
- **Poor shedding:** this is usually caused by low environmental humidity and can be easily rectified by providing a suitable humid hide. It can also be caused by mites and some diseases.
- **Swellings & lumps:** like all animals snakes can develop growths and tumours. Any unusual lumps or swellings should be examined by a vet as soon as possible.
- **Respiratory problems:** a possible infection is indicated by mouth gaping and/or bubbly mucus from the mouth or nostrils. Mouth gaping or inability to close neatly, due to swelling, can be indicative of mouth infections

Your snake's eyes will become cloudy from time to time. This is not a health issue but indicates that it is about to shed its old skin. Increasing the humidity in the housing will assist with shedding. Make sure you check both eyes have shed successfully, as sometimes this protective eye cap remains adhered.

If you are at all worried about the health of your snake you should consult a vet as soon as possible. It is recommended to seek a vet with reptile experience.

Your pet should also be insured against unexpected veterinary costs.

