

FEEDING

One of the first things that you need to remember about snakes is that they are predators. Simply put, this means in the wild they kill for food. Fortunately, there is no need to replicate this for snakes in captivity, but some of the conditions will have to be reproduced, **BUT NOT FEEDING LIVE PREY!** This practice is known to happen with some 'unscrupulous' keepers, but it is cruel, unnecessary and can actually be dangerous for the snake. A cornered animal i.e. a mouse or rat, will probably try to defend itself and in a confined space, your snake could possibly be injured.

FOOD TYPES

Most species of snakes that you will buy, or have already bought will usually feed on rodents. Depending on the size of your snake, there are various sizes of prey items that you can buy:

- 'Pinkies' (new born mice)
- 'Fuzzies' (a little older, but with fur)
- day old chicks
- adult mice
- rat pups
- adult rats
- rabbits



All of the above have their place during the lifespan of your snake, from the pinkies for your hatchlings, to the rabbits if you have a very large snake. You should be able to purchase any of the above from pet shops selling reptiles, but certainly specialist foodstuffs are available online and can, if necessary, be purchased in bulk.

FEEDING REGIMEN?

There are no hard and fast rules about how often a snake will feed, but a good rule of thumb is to observe when it defecates. Disgusting, maybe, but it is a good indicator that its' last meal is almost certainly digested and therefore it could now be hungry again.

There are a few things you need to know that will help ensure you give your snake the best chance to feed:

- Snakes will not eat cold prey and so the food item must be offered at body temperature, in other words it must be **warm**. One of the best ways to heat it is to put the food item into a plastic bag and place that into a container of warm water. Make sure that the bag is fastened so that the item does not get wet!
- Use forceps or pincers of some description when offering the food item to the snake. This should ensure that your fingers stay where they are meant to be, on your hand!
- Some pet shops sell reptile supplements of various types i.e. vitamins etc that can be added to food. They are worth checking out, though you should use them with caution and seek advice from fellow hobbyists. Online pet stores are another source and may sell them at cheaper prices.
- Another informed piece of advice is to leave the snake alone for around two days after feeding. If the animal becomes stressed and this is possible through handling, it may regurgitate its' food. There are not many things as disgusting to clean up than a half digested rodent! It looks awful and can smell much worse!

The picture below shows one of our Boa Constrictors feeding on an adult mouse. Typically, these snakes strike at their prey and constrict it causing death by suffocation. Even with dead prey, they will perform this act before gripping the food



and swallowing it whole, head first.

If you think that the picture is at all unpleasant, then we would suggest that you consider something else as a hobby.

Snakes are definitely not for you!

Occasionally, there are instances when

snakes may refuse to feed. The reasons are many and varied but there are things that can be done. If you want any information on how to persuade them to feed and the steps that you can take yourself, before engaging the help of a vet, please contact us. We can also provide advice on any other aspect of feeding.

OTHER ANIMALS

So far we have only spoken about snakes. Of course there are several other reptiles that you may own, e.g. lizards, and all will have their own feeding requirements. Some will eat Crickets and contrary to the abhorrent idea of live prey being offered, Crickets will in fact be placed in the enclosure **LIVE!** This can put people off when it comes either handling the Crickets or seeing the animal catching and eating them. Some lizards will live on a diet of vegetables and fruit and some on a mixture of those and insects. Some will even eat pinkies!

There are so many other species of reptile that may be kept, it is impossible to give a complete breakdown of feeding requirements for all of them. Clearly, you should have already researched the animal you are intending getting and so be aware of what its needs are. However, if you need any further advice or any other information, once again, contact us.

The main thing to remember with the food process is to remove any remaining food after a reasonable time and certainly before it starts to rot! Your enclosure cleaning routine **should** assure that this is the case anyway!