

Kingsnake (Lampropeltis)

General Information

In the wild, Kingsnakes can be found in areas of desert, swamps, in farmlands and grasslands. They are constrictors and consume a variety of prey, including other snakes, amphibians, lizards, rodents, birds and even rattlesnakes. An interesting point about some Kingsnakes is their mimicry of venomous Coral snakes. Both snakes have yellow, red and black bands. Kingsnakes have black bands touching the red bands; in Corals, the yellow touches the red bands. Though this colouration is a useful defence tool in some instances, for people who are unaware of the subtle difference, it is often a sign that they should lash out!

Brief overview of needs

Over the years captive breeding has produced many and varied colours and patterns; albinos, striped and even mottled examples abound. However, still very striking are those that are naturally coloured. Depending on the species, adult's size can vary from a little as three feet up to six feet plus.



As with all snakes the Kingsnake is an escape artist. If there is a small, even tiny gap, or perhaps a part of your enclosure is not quite tight enough, your snake will escape. Kingsnakes, more than any other snake, will find a way if there is one and once gone, they are very difficult to find. For this reason, the purchase of a good quality enclosure, or a custom built enclosure, is of extreme importance. It is also necessary to give the snake plenty of stretching room because Kingsnakes, like the other snakes in the family Colubridae, have only one functioning lung, due to the lack

of space inside their body. This reduced lung capacity and an inability to regularly stretch out fully if not in a suitably sized enclosure means that they are prone to respiratory infections.

In captivity, extremes of temperature are only required if you are breeding from your animals. Generally speaking a temperature of 76-86 F, with night times in low 70's, will be quite sufficient along with a thermal gradient, (warmer at one end than at the other.) Do not guess what the temperature might be, always use a thermometer. Ensure that you have a good heavy water bowl in the enclosure, one that cannot be



easily knocked over. Like other snake species, Kingsnakes are very secretive and you must therefore provide a hide box of some description. **Bear in mind that the Kingsnake eats other snakes and also lizards, so**

don't have your Kingsnake sharing accommodation. Many keepers have 'lost' a snake in these circumstances and have even found the Kingsnake dead from eating a meal it cannot cope with!

Finally

After giving your snake a couple of days to settle in, begin picking it up and handling it gently. Unless a snake has been handled a lot already, it will not be particularly tame when you first pick it up. Be gentle but persistent. Daily contact will establish a level of trust and confidence between you and the snake. A stressed snake may try to escape from you as you hold it and certainly as soon as it is free of your hands, so watch it carefully.