

WELCOME TO A.R.C!

AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE CONSERVATION PROGRAM



COME MEET OUR AMBASSADORS!

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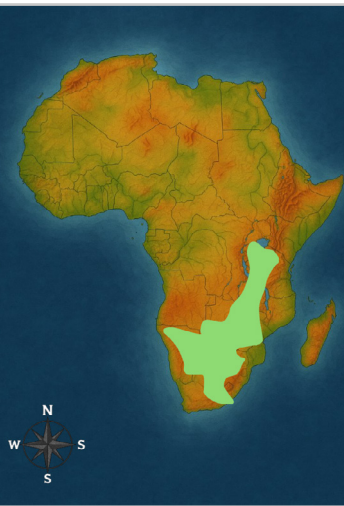
AFRICAN BULLFROG

Pyxicephalus adspersus



I was named **MEEP** because it is the sound I make when I am mad! I was born in 2019 and was smaller than a marble when I got to MSSU. I have been growing quickly, eating anything that moves! Because of my appetite, I can't be housed with any other organisms. Regardless of their size, I will actively try to consume whatever is offered to me...including the fingers of the animal care students who feed me! My Genus name is a combination of two words Pyxis meaning "small", and cephalus meaning "head". While I might eat everything, I am pretty easy going and don't move around much. You will probably find me in the same spot all year!

"With leathery skin, a thunderous bellow, and a warrior's appetite, the African Bullfrog rules the puddled plains with prehistoric power."



Where are they found?

Native to sub-Saharan Africa, especially countries like South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. Most common in the savannas and grasslands of southern Africa. Extirpated from Eswatini (formerly known as Swaziland).

What environment do they live in?

Prefer seasonally wet grasslands, savannas, and lowland floodplains. Spend most of the dry season underground, sealed in a mucous cocoon to avoid desiccation (drying out). Emerge with the summer rains to breed and feed.

What do they eat?

They are voracious carnivores and ambush predators. Their diet includes insects, spiders, rodents, and occasionally includes small birds, snakes, and other reptiles! Will eat almost anything that they can overpower and swallow.

How big do they get?

Among the largest frogs in the world! Males can get up to 25 cm in length and can weigh over 1 kg! Females are often smaller at 10-15 cm.

Conservation status?

Currently listed as IUCN Least Concern but until 2013, they were listed as Near Threatened. Conservation initiatives, legal protections, and awareness campaigns reversed their declines!

Interesting Facts:

- Males are highly territorial during the breeding season and will fight fiercely for mates.
- One of the only frog species with parental care: males guard tadpoles and will dig escape channels for their babies if their puddle begins to dry out.



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



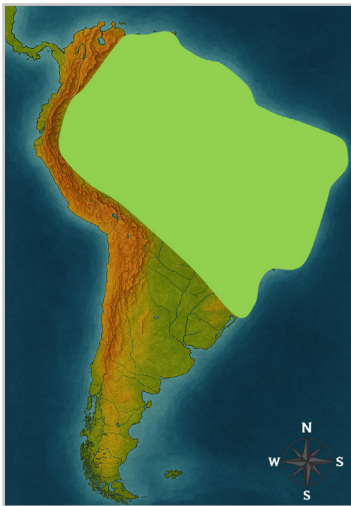
AMAZON TREE BOA

Corallus hortulana



Hello, my name is **Arthritis**! It might be hard to believe, but I am over 5ft in length! While I am quite long, I am very skinny! My body type is an evolutionary response to living an arboreal life. My heart is closer to my head, I have specialized veins and arteries, and my teeth are disproportionately long so that I can catch birds. I will likely be asleep most of the day, as I am nocturnal. I have large eyes to help me see in the dark and I also have quite a few facial pits that allow me to detect heat. While my species is long and skinny, we are strong constrictors and have been reported to eat some meals close our own weight!

"With coiled grace, piercing eyes, and a hunter's patience, the Amazon Tree Boa reigns among the branches as a master of stealth."



Where are they found?

Northern South America, including Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, and the Guianas. They also occur on the island of Trinidad, just off Venezuela's coast.

What environment do they live in?

They thrive in humid and complex environments including primary and secondary forests and river edges. They spend much of their time in trees and shrubs but will also descend to the lower canopy to hunt.

What do they eat?

Change diet as they grow (ontogenetic diet shift). Juveniles primarily eat frogs, lizards, and insects while adults consume mainly birds and mammals but occasionally eat other reptiles.

How big do they get?

Typical adult size is 1.5 m in length but only 0.5-1 kg in weight. Exceptionally large individuals can reach up to 1.7 m and weigh 2 kg.

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Least Concern as they are widespread across their range. While not endangered, they depend heavily on the health of the Amazon Basin.

Interesting Facts:

- They come in a large variety of colors and patterns, likely to assist in camouflage.
- While relatively small, they have some of the longest teeth of any snake species so that they can hold onto their prey in an arboreal environment.



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated

AXOLOTL

Ambystoma mexicanum



Our names are **Edward** (Ed for short), **Spoon**, and **Jeff**. We each came from different homes in the region and were donated after our previous owners no longer had the space and time to care for us properly. Our current keepers often say that between the three of us, we have a maximum of two brain cells. We spend our days trying to eat everything, sometimes just lunging at water for no reason. You may notice that our cage is dimly lit. That is because several of us are albino and leucistic (lacking the ability to produce pigment). That means our eyes are more susceptible to damage from bright lights. Be sure to say hi and tell our keepers we want more worms!

“With feathery gills, an eternal youth, and otherworldly charm, the Axolotl drifts like a living legend through the waters of ancient Mexico.”

Where are they found?

Native only to one location in Mexico City, Mexico. Formerly widespread in several nearby lakes, they are now restricted to lakes and canals of Xochimilco due to urbanization, habitat loss, and climate change.

What environment do they live in?

Live in cool, freshwater habitats. Found in slow-moving lakes, canals, and wetlands with abundant aquatic vegetation. Unlike most amphibians, they are fully aquatic throughout their entire life.

What do they eat?

They are carnivorous and eat a variety of prey including worms, insects and larvae, crustaceans, and even small fish. In captivity, they thrive on diets of bloodworms, earthworms, brine shrimp, and specially formulated pellets.

How big do they get?

Born smaller than a 1 cm, they can reach 30 cm in total length as adults. Both sexes reach similar size, but males often have slimmer bodies and longer tails.

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Critically Endangered. Their wild population is estimated to be less than 1,000 left. Unfortunately, the United States has not formally listed them under the Endangered Species Act.

Interesting Facts:

- Axolotls exhibit neoteny: they retain juvenile characters as adults (gills)
- They are famous for their regenerative abilities! They can regrow entire limbs, portions of their heart, spinal cord, and even brain tissue!
- They live in cold water (60 °C)!



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



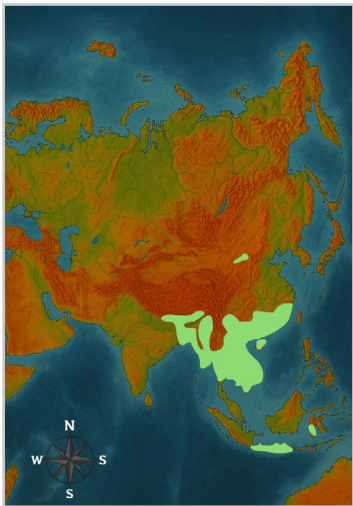
BURMESE PYTHON

Python bivittatus



Hi there, my name is **Popcorn!** I came to MSSU in 2021 after I outgrew the enclosure of my previous owner. I am albino which means I can't produce the typical green and brown colors of my species, instead, I am yellow and white! I am very friendly once I am out of my cage but must be given a warning before I am picked up. Since I am fed in my enclosure, I often get too excited and strike at anything that comes into my home because I think its food. Thankfully, my caretakers have "tap trained" me where they gently boop me on the nose, letting me know that it is not feeding time. If this is done, I know that I am about to be handled and am ready to explore!

"With stealthy habits, rapid growth, and powerful constriction behavior, the Burmese Python reigns as a quiet giant of the Southeast Asian wild."



Where are they found?

Southeast Asia including Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and parts of southern China and Indonesia. Have become well established and invasive in Florida where they are decimating local wildlife populations.

What environment do they live in?

Prefer wetlands, grasslands, marshes, forests, and swamps. In the wild, they often stay near water sources and are excellent swimmers. In Florida, they thrive in subtropical freshwater ecosystems, particularly within the Everglades.

What do they eat?

Due to their large change in size, almost all vertebrate groups are consumed at some point in their growth. Mice, Rats, Rabbits, Deer, Possum, Raccoon, Lizards, Birds, and Alligators.

How big do they get?

Females are larger than males (sexually dimorphic). Males: 2-4 m (12-20kg) Females: 3-5 m (25-70kg). Most extremely large individuals in captivity are morbidly obese due to improper care.

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Vulnerable due to habitat loss and overharvesting (estimated 30% decline since 2010). Within the United States, they are invasive in Florida where they are actively hunted.

Interesting Facts:

- The first albino was imported to the US in 1981 for \$21,000, marking a pivotal moment in the reptile breeding industry.
- The invasive Florida population has reduced most native mammal populations to less than 5% of their original size.



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated

CALIFORNIA KINGSNAKE

Lampropeltis californiae



I'm **Beetlejuice!** I got my name because I look like the sandworm from Tim Burton's famous movie. I was born in 2008 and am enjoying retirement in my enclosure designed to mimic the shrublands and deserts of the western US where I am from. While I am getting a bit older now, I am always voted "most likely to bite my keepers" because if it moves, I want to eat it! Because of this, I am on a diet where my food intake is regulated. I am a bit shy, so I am most likely to be out in the morning when the lights first turn on and near the end of the day when the hallways get a bit less busy. If you see my keepers, let them know I want all the snacks!

"With striking patterns, unmatched versatility, and a taste for other snakes, the California Kingsnake thrives as a nimble ruler of the American Southwest."

Where are they found?

Native to the Western United States and northern Mexico. Most common in California, but also found in Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Oregon, and northwestern Mexico (including Baja California). An invasive population exists on the Canary Islands off the coast of Spain.

What environment do they live in?

Highly adaptable and are found in deserts, scrublands, grasslands, chaparral, woodlands, forests, and edge habitats. Often found near agricultural and suburban areas. Generally considered the "raccoon" of the snake world due to their adaptability.

What do they eat?

Considered a predatory generalist and will consume rodents, lizards, amphibians, birds, eggs, other snakes, and invertebrates. A dietary analysis showed that during the dry season, most of their prey are other snakes. During the rainy season they mainly eat mammals and birds.

How big do they get?

Males and females are similar in size and typically reach 0.75-1.2 m in length. They are born quite small (<0.25m). Large individuals above 1.5 m are rare.

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Least Concern, indicating a stable and widespread population across its native range. A resilient and adaptable species, thriving in various habitats.

Interesting Facts:

- Their common name "Kingsnake" refers to their ability to readily consume other snakes.
- They are fully immune to the venomous snakes that they prey upon.
- Their black and white color pattern blurs together when they move, confusing predators.



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated

CARPET PYTHON

Morelia spilota



Hello! Our names are **Carl** (albino Darwin's Carpet Python) and **Lynn** (Coastal Carpet Python). We are both Carpet Pythons native to Australia. Carl (*Morelia spilota variegata*) comes from northwestern Australia while Lynn (*Morelia spilota mcdowelli*) comes from northeastern Australia. Both of these individuals were surrendered to our program from local individuals in southwest Missouri. In general, this species is not communal but we offer them multiple thermal opportunities ("hot spots") and feed them separately so they get along nicely. They are generally nocturnal so you are likely to see them asleep during the day.

"With patterned coils, a hunter's patience, and the silent grace of the forest, the Carpet Python weaves through branches and shadows with ancient power and quiet dominance."

Where are they found?

Native to Australia, New Guinea, and parts of Indonesia. Widely distributed across northern, eastern, and southern Australia, including Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, and Western Australia.

What environment do they live in?

Inhabit tropical rainforests, dry forests and savannas, grasslands, woodlands, and even urban areas. They are arboreal as juveniles but often become more terrestrial as they age.

What do they eat?

They are strictly carnivorous constrictors. They regularly feed on rodents, possums, bats, birds (and their eggs), reptiles, and occasionally koalas and wallabies.

How big do they get?

Their size varies by subspecies but they generally reach 2-4 m in length (some can reach lengths >5 m). Typically weight 5-15 kg as adults.

Conservation status?

Currently listed as IUCN Least Concern with relatively stable populations. This is largely attributed to Australia's ban on exporting wildlife into the pet trade.

Interesting Facts:

- They get their name from their intricate patterns resembling woven carpet designs
- Female will stay with their eggs and incubate them by shivering and regulating their temperature.
- Among the largest snakes in Australia.



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



CENTRAL AMERICAN BOA

Boa imperator



We are **Bob** and **Linda**! We are both the same species but have different colors. Linda has a normal pattern of our species but Bob is a Hypomelanistic form which means she is lighter in coloration and has a “rusty” appearance. We are both ~7 years old and have lived together since 2023. You will often find us laying together but rest assured, we are fed separately because we both have huge appetites. You may have heard people calling us “Boa constrictors” but that name applies to a very specific group of our Boa cousins that live south of us in South America. We don’t move much but we love people watching!

“With velvet coils, ancient strength, and a predator’s patience, the Central American Boa glides through jungle shadows as a silent sentinel of the forest night.”

Where are they found?

Native to northern Mexico through Central America, including Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Documented populations exist in Florida as a result of Hurricane damage and released pets.

What environment do they live in?

Inhabits tropical rainforests, dry forests, savannas, and even disturbed farmland. This adaptability has helped the species remain widespread, and has been found living up to 1,000 m above sea level.

What do they eat?

They are generalist and opportunistic carnivores. While primarily consuming rodents in captivity, they have been documented to consume rodents, bats, marsupials, small monkeys, birds, eggs, lizards, frogs, and even members of their own species!

How big do they get?

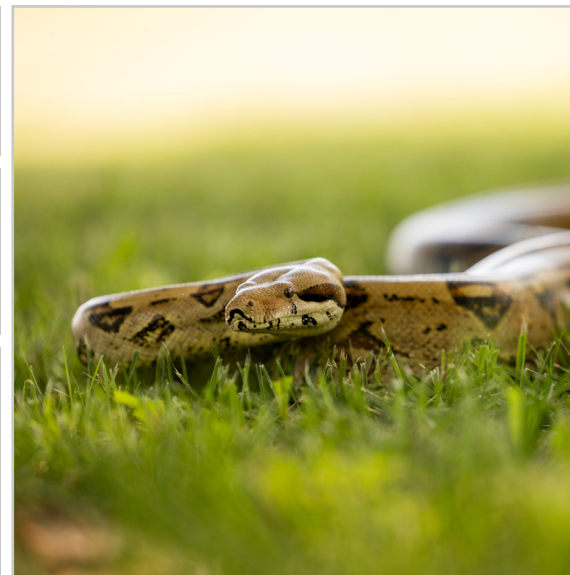
This species is sexually dimorphic with females getting larger (2 m) than males (<1.8m). Exceptionally large individuals can reach 3 m in length but this size is quite rare.

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Least Concern but is CITES Appendix II which means its international trade is regulated. Habitat destruction, illegal collecting, and road mortality are their largest concerns.

Interesting Facts:

- Females don’t lay eggs, they give live birth!
- Both males and females often have “cloacal spurs” which are actually remnants of their legs!
- When threatened, are able to produce loud an intimidating hisses.



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



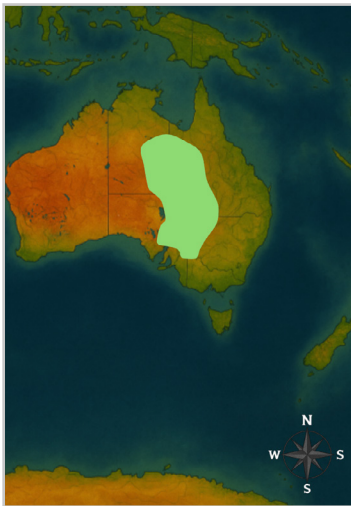
CENTRAL BEARDED DRAGON



Pogona vitticeps

Well hello, my name is **Peg-leg Petunia**! When my species is young, there are no external characters to determine which sex we are. I was originally named Peg-leg PETE but once I grew up a bit, everyone realized I was a young female dragon! You may notice that I am missing part of my front leg. When I first hatched, I was housed with other dragons and was bit so many times, I had to have it amputated. Rest assured, it does not impact my mobility! I will readily charge after my caretakers like they are food! I am very active, and my species (including myself) are quite territorial. If you see me head bobbing, that is me establishing my dominance over you!

"With spiny armor, sun-loving habits, and bold personality, the bearded dragon stands as a rugged icon of Australia's arid heartland."



Where are they found?

Native to Central and inland Australia. Especially common in Queensland, Northern Territory, South Australia, and New South Wales. Endemic only to Australia but sold as pets globally.

What environment do they live in?

Found in deserts, dry scrublands, woodlands, and rocky outcrops. Terrestrial but excellent climbers, often seen basking on rocks, logs, and fences. While we live in the desert, we are still diurnal with most of our activity occurring in the morning and late afternoon.

What do they eat?

They are omnivorous, feeding on invertebrates, vegetation, and small vertebrates. Smaller individuals tend to consume more invertebrates and as they grow, more and more vegetation is incorporated into their diet.

How big do they get?

Males are typically larger and have broader heads. Adults typically reach 0.45-0.61 m in length and 300-500 grams. They are born quite small (<5 grams!)

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Least Concern. While incredibly popular in the pet trade, Australia banned their export in the 1960s. All captive individuals come from lineages pre-dating the export ban.

Interesting Facts:

- The "beard" of their common name is in reference to the spiky scales under their chin.
- A 2015 study showed that high-temperatures during incubation can transform genetically male individuals into functional females that are able to lay eggs!



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated

COMMON MUSK TURTLE

Sternotherus odoratus



My name is **Bonnie**! Nobody knows how old I am because I was captured as adults at Kellogg Lake in Carthage, MO! I am full grown and am Missouri's smallest turtle. I became ambassador animals in 2020 when a team of MSSU students discovered our species here. The first and only mention of our species in the region came from the first book ever written on Missouri Reptiles and Amphibians in 1911. My species is abundant and commonly detected in the region, but scientific records were lacking. You can tell males from females apart by our tail lengths. Females have very short tails while males have longer tails!

"With a feisty spirit, a secretive nature, and a scent that earns respect, the Common Musk Turtle prowls the muddy bottoms like a pocket-sized warrior of the wetlands."

Where are they found?

Native to eastern North America, ranging from southern Ontario and Quebec, all the way to Florida and parts of Texas. Their range overlaps with many aquatic and semi-aquatic turtle species.

What environment do they live in?

Thrive in slow-moving, shallow freshwater ponds, lakes, rivers, and streams. They prefer areas with soft, muddy bottoms, dense aquatic vegetation, and plenty of submerged cover.

What do they eat?

They are primarily carnivorous and feed along the bottom. Known to eat aquatic insects, crustaceans, mollusks (especially snails), small fish, and will readily scavenge on carrion.

How big do they get?

They are among the smallest North American Turtles. Adults typically reach 8-13 cm in shell length. Males are generally smaller than females but have longer tails.

Conservation status?

Currently listed as Least Concern by the IUCN. Populations are stable, though local declines have occurred due to habitat loss, water pollution, and wetland drainage.

Interesting Facts:

- They get the name "stinkpot" because they release a strong, musky odor from scent glands when threatened.
- Unlike many turtles, they are excellent climbers and can often be found several feet above the water, resting on branches!



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated

EASTERN INDIGO SNAKE

Drymarchon couperi



My name is **Tallahassee**. I was born in 2008 and was a captive-bred individual from a private breeder (Black Pearl Reptiles). Thankfully, I was donated to MSSU in 2024, and I get to live out my retirement years here with you all! While I no longer am used for breeding, I have a long life ahead of me where students can learn to care for me. I am a gentle giant and am very intelligent. As I get older, my caretakers need to make sure that I know they aren't food because I have longer teeth and can bite very hard! Luckily, I am quite calm and very much enjoy people watching! My species is an active forager and relies heavily on eyesight and I use mine to watch all the students!

"With shimmering midnight scales, fearless movements, and a role as a keystone predator, the Eastern Indigo Snake is a symbol of southeastern wilderness and balance."

Where are they found?

Found exclusively in the Southeastern United States. They occur in Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama. In 2012, Alabama listed the species as extirpated, but reintroduction efforts have begun in 2022.

What environment do they live in?

Frequent inhabitants of pine flatwoods, longleaf pine sandhills, and scrubby upland habitats of the South. They often rely on Gopher Tortoise burrows for shelter and thermoregulation.

What do they eat?

Their diet is unlike most snakes you know. They will eat anything that moves! Known to consume snakes, turtles, lizards, frogs, toads, fish, birds, eggs, mammals, and carrion (scavenged/decaying animal flesh).

How big do they get?

The largest snake in North America! Often reach lengths of 1.5-2.1 meters (5-7 ft). The largest recorded individual reached 2.8 meters in length (9.2 ft!)

Conservation status?

Listed as Federally Threatened under the Endangered Species Act due to extreme habitat loss and urbanization of the Southeastern United States.

Interesting Facts:

- My Genus (*Drymarchon*) is Greek for "lord of the forest" because I am a formidable predator.
- I am nonvenomous, can't constrict, but am immune to snake venom! Instead, I deliver incredibly powerful bites and can decapitate other snakes!



Endangered Species Act of 1973:



Extinct



Endangered



Threatened



Delisted

EASTERN KINGSNAKE

Lampropeltis getula



My name is **Lumpy**! I am an axanthic Eastern Kingsnake. Being an axanthic means that I have a particular type of albinism in which I can't produce yellows, oranges, or reds. I can still produce blacks and browns but I look purple because you are seeing my blood through my skin. Speak of blood, and my name, I am called Lumpy because I have a unique medical condition. We don't know why but I have a large aortic aneurism that can't be treated (see the sonogram below!). Luckily, it does not cause me any harm, it just looks like I swallowed a quarter, making me lumpy (my name!). We drained it once but it quickly refilled. To be safe, I eat small meals now so I don't overexert myself.

"With glossy armor, a fearless grip, and a hunger for serpents, the Eastern Kingsnake slithers through tangled thickets as the unchallenged monarch of the forest floor."



Where are they found?

Native to the southeastern and mid-Atlantic United States. Range from southern New Jersey to northern Florida and westward into parts of Alabama and Mississippi. Especially common in Georgia, the Carolinas, and eastern Tennessee.

What environment do they live in?

Highly adaptable and found in hardwood forests, pine forests, swamps and floodplains, farmlands and suburban edges. While primarily terrestrial, they are excellent swimmers and will readily navigate all ecosystem types.

What do they eat?

They are generalist and opportunistic carnivores. Readily consume insects, amphibians, birds, eggs, rodents, lizards, and other snakes. They are immune to the venom of native pit vipers, making them effective predators of venomous snakes.

How big do they get?

Large individuals may approach 1.8 meters but they typically reach 1.1-1.5 m in length as adults. Both sexes are similar in size and become heavy-bodied and robust as adults.

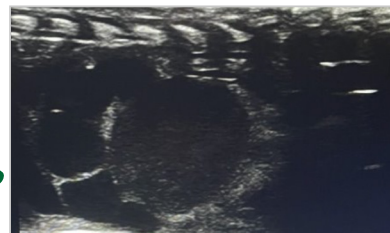
Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Least Concern and abundant in many areas of its range. Locally threatened in some states due to habitat loss, road mortality, and collection for the pet trade. Protected in some areas.



Interesting Facts:

- Their Genus name (*Lampropeltis*) means "shiny shield"—referring to their glossy look.
- When threatened, they can vibrate their tail and in leaf litter and debris, can sound like a rattle!
- You can see a sonogram of lumpy here that shows her spine (at the top) and the large aneurism.



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated

INDONESIAN BLUE-TONGUE SKINK



Tiliqua gigas

I'm **Ralph**, nice to meet you! I was rescued in 2021 but was already an adult when I was surrendered to the A.R.C. Program. I had a slow recovery when I first arrived. I had seven stuck sheds due to poor husbandry from my previous owner. As a result, I lost a few of my fingers, but rest assured, I am still mobile! I will move especially fast for my favorite foods: shrimp, roaches, and canned cat food. I move much slower for my leafy greens. I am pretty shy and like to hide a lot. I am almost 18 inches in length but am a hide and seek champion! I often bury myself with just my nostrils sticking out. The best time to see me is in the early morning when things are still quiet.

"With armored scales, a bold blue tongue, and the swagger of a rainforest king, the Indonesian Blue-tongue Skink slinks through the undergrowth with calm confidence and ancient charm."

Where are they found?

Native to New Guinea, Indonesia, and surrounding islands. Specific populations are found on Halmahera, Irian Jaya (now West Papua), and Merauke. Their close cousin lives south of them in Australia.

What environment do they live in?

Inhabit humid tropical environments including rainforests, savannas, and moist forest edges and underbrush. They are terrestrial and prefer to hide in leaf litter, under logs, or in debris.

What do they eat?

They are omnivorous and eat a combination of both plant and animal matter. For animal matter, they readily consume insects, snails, earthworms, carrion, and occasionally small vertebrates. For plant matter, they often eat fallen fruit and leaves.

How big do they get?

Among the largest skink species, reaching up to 61 cm in length and 1 kg in weight! Males and females attain similar size and show no obvious secondary sexual characters to distinguish them.

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Least Concern but wild populations are under pressure from habitat loss and collection for the pet trade. Trade is regulated under CITES Appendix II, meaning export requires monitoring and permits.

Interesting Facts:

- Their famous tongue is used to startle predators.
- Unlike most lizards, they are viviparous, giving birth to live young rather than eggs.
- They have a strong jaw capable of crushing snail shells, hard-shelled insects, and even killing small vertebrates like mice!



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



NORTHERN PINE SNAKE

Pituophis melanoleucus



Hello, I am **Daquiri**, a Northern Pine Snake! Even though I am large, I am still a young gal (I was born in 2022). I really enjoy people watching and have become quite social. I still have some typical pine snake behaviors though. When my keepers pick me up, I almost always hiss and shake my tail in protest. However, I quickly calm down and like to explore (with supervision of course). You may have noticed that I am not as shiny as other snakes in the A.R.C. because I have keeled scales. That means each of my scales has a raised ridge running along it, which makes me feel like sandpaper when I crawl through your hands.

“With bold markings, a commanding hiss, and a burrower’s strength, the Northern Pine Snake rules the sandy pine barrens with ancient resilience.”



Where are they found?

Native to the eastern United States with isolated populations found in New Jersey Pine Barrens (the stronghold population), parts of southern New York, eastern Pennsylvania, and western North Carolina. Rare and scattered records from Kentucky and Tennessee.

What environment do they live in?

Prefer dry, open, sandy pine-oak forests and scrub habitats. Often found in well-drained, loose soils. They are excellent burrowers, often using or expanding mammal burrows and even digging their own!

What do they eat?

They are strong constrictors that primarily feed on small mammals (mice, voles, squirrels, and juvenile rabbits) as well as birds and eggs. They often raid burrows or nests, consuming multiple animals in one sitting. One individual was recorded having 35 different animals in their stomach!

How big do they get?

Among the largest snakes of North America. Most adults reach 1.2-1.8 meters with exceptionally large individuals reaching over 2 m in length.

Conservation status?

Currently listed as IUCN Least Concern as a whole but this subspecies is at risk due to its fragmented range. Receives state-level protections in New Jersey, North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee.

Interesting Facts:

- Can produce a deep, loud hiss amplified by a modified glottis.
- This species has strong site fidelity, often returning to the same hibernation or nesting sites each year.
- Will dig their own nests to lay eggs!



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated

NORTHERN SPIDER TORTOISE

Pyxis arachnoides brygooi



Hello! Our names are **Charlotte** and **Wilbur**! Charlotte was born Jan 16, 2017 at Zoo Knoxville but owned by the San Diego Zoo. She is a mother of one. Wilbur was born Dec 3, 2010 at Zoo Knoxville and is a father of four! Both arrived at MSSU in October 2025 as permanent residents of the A.R.C. Program! Charlotte is more black than yellow while Wilbur is more yellow than black. They are rather peaceful animals and are most active in the early morning (6-7am) and later afternoon (4-6pm). They spend most of their days napping and people watching. Over the next several years, with some luck, MSSU will produce captive babies to assist in their conservation!

“With webbed patterns of golden lines, a desert’s resilience, and a secretive nature, the Spider Tortoise endures Madagascar’s spiny sands with beauty woven into survival.”



Where are they found?

Native only to the southwest coast of Madagascar. Distributed along several coastal habitats including semi-arid, sandy soils, thorny shrubs, succulent plants, and low vegetation. Most ecosystems get very little rainfall.

What environment do they live in?

Live in dry savanna, spiny forest scrub habitats, and areas with partial canopy cover (30-50%). In dry seasons, many individuals may burrow or bury themselves deeply into loose sand, soil, and leaf litter to escape heat and conserve moisture.

What do they eat?

Primarily herbivorous, they browse on leaves, succulent plants, and seasonal vegetation. Opportunistic omnivores that will feed on insect larvae (especially in dung), fallen fruit, detritus, and other small animal matter.

How big do they get?

One of the smallest tortoises in the world. Typically reach <15 cm in length. They are estimated to live 50-70 years in captivity with females being slightly bigger.

Conservation status?

These are IUCN Red Listed as Critically Endangered. Population viability models project long-term declines with some estimates suggesting extinction in 60-80 years.

Interesting Facts:

- Their scientific name (*Pyxis arachnoides*) translates to “tiny spider”.
- Their subspecies lacks a hinged plastron (bottom of the shell) but their southern subspecies can close their shell like a box turtle and we have no idea why!



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated

PANCAKE TORTOISE

Malacochersus tornieri



Hello! Our names are **Waffles**, **Blueberry**, and **Buttermilk**. We are unlike any other tortoises alive, we are flat and flexible! We came to MSSU in 2025 and were one of the last legal imports of our species from Tanzania almost a decade prior. We are rather shy and would normally spend our days hiding. However, our habitat is set up so that we can take shelter but you can still see us. We are one male (Waffles) and two females who have been an established breeding group. The goal is for us to produce babies so that we can be given to zoos and conservation centers to help better preserve our species from extinction.

“With paper-thin armor, flexible bones, and a climber’s agility, the Pancake Tortoise slips through rocky crevices with survival shaped by stone and shadow.”



Where are they found?

Native to East Africa, primarily in Tanzania and Kenya. A small population persists in Zambia. Distributed in highly localized, restricted rocky outcrops (kopjes) in savanna and scrub regions.

What environment do they live in?

Live in dry savanna and scrubland ecosystems with abundant rocky hillsides. Uniquely adapted to rock crevices—their flat, flexible shells allow them to wedge into cracks for protection.

What do they eat?

Primarily herbivorous, feeding on grasses, leaves, flowers, and seeds. Opportunistically browses on succulent plants that store water, important for survival in dry environments. May occasionally eat fallen fruit depending on seasonal availability.

How big do they get?

One of the smallest tortoises in the world. Typically reach 15-18 cm in length. Males are longer tails than females and are generally lighter than females.

Conservation status?

These are IUCN Red Listed as Critically Endangered. There are less than 5,000 wild individuals left of this species due to pet trade collection, specialized habitats, and slow reproduction.

Interesting Facts:

- Pancake tortoises live communally and are unusually social to one another.
- Females lay just one egg at a time, though they may lay several through the breeding season.
- They rely on rocks for their armor rather than their own shell!



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



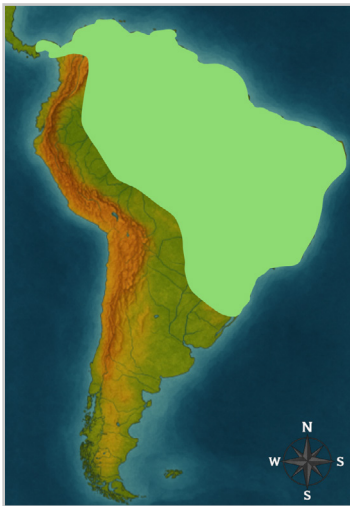
RED-FOOTED TORTOISE

Chelonoidis carbonarius



Hello, my name is **Cleveland**! I was born somewhere around 1985, and I was rescued by Dr. Penning in 2007. At the time of my rescue, I was living in a 10-gallon aquarium that I could not turn around in and hadn't been fed in over half a year. Thankfully, I am a notoriously hardy species. Now, I spend my days terrorizing Reynold's Hall! I actively try to break every light-bulb and heat source provided, and I put in hard work trampling any plants that are put in my enclosure. My caregivers voted me as the recipient of the "menace to society" award! I rotate in and out of hallway displays so if you see a foot-ball sized tortoise, be sure to say hello!

"With vivid colors, ancient instincts, and surprising appetites, the red-footed tortoise is a living example of tropical adaptability."



Where are they found?

Northern South America, including Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, and the Guianas. They also occur on several Caribbean islands, where they were likely introduced by humans.

What environment do they live in?

Lives in tropical and subtropical forests, savannas, and grasslands and are commonly found near forest edges and seasonal wetlands. They often favor humid environments with plenty of leaf litter and understory vegetation.

What do they eat?

Considered omnivorous, they feeding on fruits, leaves, flowers, fungi, and occasionally invertebrates and other meat sources. There have been documented cases of cannibalism where adults have been observed eating hatchling!

How big do they get?

Typical adult size is 30 cm (12 in) and 4-6 kg (8.8-13.2 lbs.). Exceptionally large individuals can reach up to 40 cm (16 in) and weigh over 12 kg (26 lbs.).

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Vulnerable due to habitat destruction, its wide use as food throughout their native range, and illegal wildlife trafficking for the pet-trade and use in traditional medicine.

Interesting Facts:

- Females can store sperm for over 4 years, enabling them to fertilize eggs without mating!
- In colonial times, sailors would take tortoises aboard ships because they could survive for months without food or water — making them a tragic source of fresh meat at sea.



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated

TIGER RAT SNAKE

Spilotes pullatus



We are **Zig** and **Zag**, a pair of Tiger Ratsnakes. We live together in a large enclosure because we love to climb, stretch out, and explore. While we're quite long (> 2 meters!), our tree-dwelling lifestyle keeps us slender and agile—perfect for weaving through branches. We spend our days people-watching and tongue-flicking at everything that moves. Our species hasn't been in captivity very long, and we value our independence. When our caretakers try to handle us, we make our feelings clear: we hiss, rattle our tails, flatten our bodies to look big, and yes—we might even bite. We're curious, clever, and alert, but like many snakes, we'd much rather be left alone.

**"With bold stripes, arboreal grace, and untamed spirit,
the Tiger Ratsnake is a dazzling shadow of the tropical canopy."**

Where are they found?

Native to Central and South America. Especially common in Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Brazil, and surrounding regions. Can also be found in Mexico and several Caribbean Islands.

What environment do they live in?

Found in tropical and subtropical rainforests, savannas and forest edges, and wetlands and riverbanks. Robust climbers that are occasionally found near human settlements and agriculture zones.

What do they eat?

They are highly opportunistic carnivores that will eat small mammals, birds, eggs, lizards, amphibians, and occasionally other snakes. While they are strong constrictors, they are intelligent and only use it if necessary for larger and more dangerous prey but will swallow young/harmless prey alive.

How big do they get?

Adults typically reach 1.8-2.4 meters in total length but often, over 20% of that length is their tail! Some may exceed 3 meters, making them the longest Colubrid snake in the Americas!

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Least Concern. Considered locally common in some areas, but are threatened by habitat loss, persecution, and the pet trade in part of their range.

Interesting Facts:

- When threatened, they put on a dramatic defensive display—rearing up, hissing loudly, and flattening their necks to appear larger.
- In captivity, they require large, enriched enclosures due to their size, speed, and intelligence.



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated

WESTERN RATSLAKE

Pantherophis obsoletus



Hello! My name is **Richard**! Dr. Penning adopted me from a research lab in Texas in 2012 when I was already an adult. I am very secretive and am quick to hide when people come around. I am fully grown at just under 1.5 meters. Dr. Penning calls me one of his “show snake” because of my personality; I will strike at him under any conditions! Because of my propensity for striking, I have been featured on the Discovery Channel, National Geographic, and PBS. I have been used in five different publications and am the fastest striking ratsnake ever recorded! I am getting a bit older now so I am enjoying retirement here by people watching and getting snacks!

“With inky scales, silent strength, and a climber’s cunning, the Western Ratsnake slips like a shadow through the woodlands of the American heartland.”

Where are they found?

Native to central and eastern United States, members of their Genus are found throughout the Eastern US and portions of Canada. Their range extends from Texas to Nebraska. Generally, they are found West of the Mississippi River.

What environment do they live in?

Thrive in deciduous forests, wooded hillsides, farmlands, and rocky outcrops. Common around barns, attics, and abandoned buildings—they adapt incredibly well to human presence.

What do they eat?

They are non-venomous constricting snakes that eat rodents, birds, eggs, frogs, and lizards. Their appetite for mice and rats make them natural pest control agents! In addition to rodents, they often raid bird nests in the spring.

How big do they get?

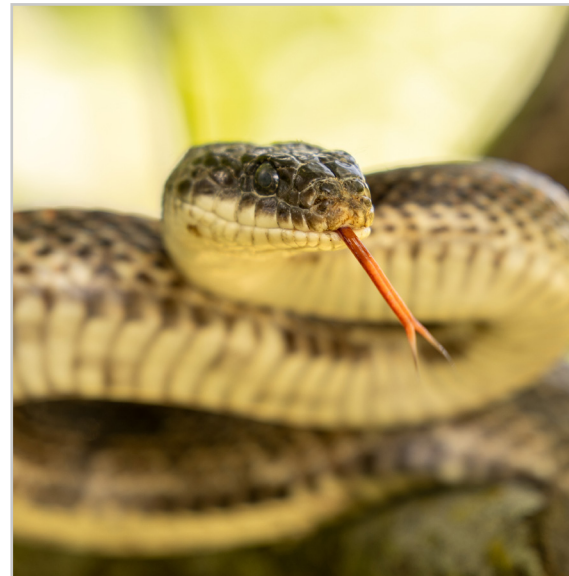
Born about the size of a pencil, they can reach total lengths of 1.2-1.8 meters. Males are often smaller than females in total length, but males will have a longer tail.

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Least Concern as their populations are stable in most areas. Threats include road mortality and persecution by due to being mistaken for a venomous snake.

Interesting Facts:

- Hatchlings are light gray with dark blotches, but in the Midwest, they turn solid black with age, earning them a regional name called the “Black Rat Snake”.
- They play a vital role in their ecosystems by helping to control rodent populations!



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



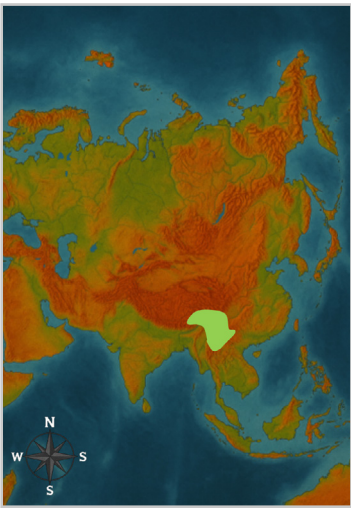
YUNNAN MOUNTAIN BEAUTY SNAKE



Elaphe taeniura yunnanensis

Hello! We are **Bacon** and **Omelette**! We are subspecies of the Chinese Beauty Ratsnake, native to the southern region of China, specifically the Yunnan Province. Our common name refers to the ornate and complex markings that we have along our body. We are highly alert and fast-moving snakes, and while we are not aggressive, we are quick to defend ourselves but quickly calm down. You may notice our cage is darker than others. That is because we often are found in caves where we hunt bats! In captivity, we readily take any form of rodent as meals but due to our appetites, we need to be fed separately. We are considered semi-arboreal and are excellent climbers.

“With flowing stripes, keen eyes, and a mind wired for movement, the Yunnan Beauty Snake coils through forest shadows and cliffside ruins—a living ribbon of grace and instinct.”



Where are they found?

Native to southern China, especially the Yunnan Province. A region known for its rich biodiversity and complex topography. It's distribution likely extends to northern Myanmar, Laos, and parts of Vietnam.

What environment do they live in?

Inhabits a diverse array of environments, typically favoring subtropical and montane forests ranging from 500-2,000 meters in elevation. Often associated with humid forest edges, rocky escarpments, abandoned structures, and even rural agricultural zones.

What do they eat?

They are generalist and opportunistic carnivores. Readily consume mice, rats, and other forest-dwelling mammals in their diet. Records also show them consuming birds, eggs, lizards, bats, amphibians, and even invertebrates.

How big do they get?

One of the largest ratsnakes in Asia but they remain lean and lightweight. Average adult size is 1.5-2 meters with exceptionally large individuals exceeding 2.4 m.

Conservation status?

Listed as IUCN Least Concern and abundant in many areas of its range. Populations appear relatively stable but threats include the pet trade, habitat destruction, and human persecution.

Interesting Facts:

- One of the only ratsnakes that will stay with their eggs during incubation.
- Known for being alert, curious, and quick to recognize routines in captivity—many will learn the behaviors and patterns of their caretakers!



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:



Extinct



Extinct in the Wild



Critically Endangered



Endangered



Vulnerable



Near Threatened



Least Concern



Data Deficient



Not Evaluated