

Kenyan Sand Boa (*Eryx colubrinus*)

Difficulty: Easy

Kenyan sand boas are a 12-24"/30-60 cm long (up to ~36"/90cm in the case of some exceptional females) species of snake with a thick, wormlike body, small head, small upward-angled eyes, vertical pupils, and an enlarged rostral scale. They are covered in extremely smooth scales, except for the tail, which has larger, rougher scales. Coloring is generally gray, yellow, or orange with darker blotches and a pale white, cream, or pinkish belly. However, a patternless form is known to exist.

Kenyan sand boas are native to arid and semi-arid environments in east Africa. They are most active at night, but they are irregularly active throughout the day to bask and hunt. Although categorized as fossorial, they are also known to occasionally climb trees.

These snakes make good pets due to their docile temperaments, manageable size, and relatively simple care requirements. With good care, they can live up to 30 years.

Shopping List

- 24"L x 18"W x 18"H reptile enclosure (preferably front-opening)
- Dual dome heat lamp with ceramic sockets
- 50w halogen flood bulb, x2
- Plug-in lamp dimmer, x2
- Infrared thermometer ("temperature gun")
- Digital probe thermometer
- Arcadia ShadeDweller UVB lamp kit
- Pressure sprayer
- Surge protector with digital timer
- >3" (22 quarts) loose substrate
- Plastic hide box
- Environmental enrichment items
 - cork flats
 - hollow logs
 - sturdy branches
 - artificial plants
 - drought-tolerant live plants
- Small water bowl
- Soft-tipped feeding tongs

Housing

A basic formula for calculating a terrestrial snake's minimum space needs is *snake length x half snake length x half snake length = length x width x height*. According to this formula, **the minimum acceptable enclosure size for an average Kenyan sand boa is 24"L x 12"W x 12"H / 60 x 30 x 30 cm**. Slightly taller is

recommended in the shopping list to provide more climbing space and a safer distance for UVB installation.

Particularly large females require a larger minimum than outlined here. Not sure how big your female sand boa might grow? If you purchased your snake from a breeder, you can predict adult length by asking them about the length of your snake's mother. It's likely that your pet will grow to a similar size.

Of course, using a larger enclosure than the minimum is strongly recommended. Bigger is always better!

Can multiple Kenyan sand boas be housed together?

Kenyan sand boas are not known to be significantly social animals, so it's best to house only one per enclosure.

Lighting & UVB

Kenyan sand boas are technically crepuscular, which means that they are most active around nighttime, including dawn and dusk. They are capable of surviving without UVB light, but it's important to remember that they can't thrive without it. This helps regulate their day/night cycle and associated hormonal rhythms, as well as provides all of the vitamin D3 they can possibly need, supporting all associated physiological processes.

According to their natural range, lights should be scheduled to be on for 12 hours/day year-round.

UVB Lighting

UVB lighting can be tricky, because in order to get the right strength of UVB (UV Index, or UVI), distance and potential mesh obstruction must be considered. To provide appropriate UVB, you will need a high-quality, low-intensity UVB bulb, roughly 1/2 the length of the enclosure, placed on the warm side of the setup. The highest branch should be positioned so the snake is no closer than the following distances from the UVB lamp:

- Arcadia ShadeDweller kit: 7-9" (mesh), 10-12" (no mesh)
- Arcadia T5 HO 6% / Zoo Med T5 HO Reptisun 5.0: 10-12" (mesh), 13-15" (no mesh)

(These recommendations are approximations based on available data. For best results, use a Solarmeter 6.5 to determine the best placement to achieve a UVI of 2.0-3.0 in the basking area.)

Heating

Humans are *warm-blooded*, which means that our body temperature is automatically regulated. Kenyan sand boas, however, are *cold-blooded*, which means that they have to move between areas of different temperatures in order to regulate their body temperature. In captivity, using halogen flood heat bulbs is the best way to replicate the type of warmth provided by sunlight.

- **Basking surface: 93-95°F (34-35°C)**
- **Cool zone: 78-83°F (26-28°C)**

Heating should be turned off at night.

Generally speaking, a 50w halogen flood bulb such as the [Arcadia Halogen Heat Lamp](#) or [Zoo Med Repti Tuff Halogen Lamp](#) should be plenty to achieve your target basking surface temperature. If you notice that they're getting too hot, dial it down with a plug-in lamp dimmer. If your basking surface is too cool, you need higher wattage bulbs.

You will need multiple heat bulbs to create a large enough basking area to evenly heat your snake's coiled body. Two bulbs should be enough for an average Kenyan sand boa.

To measure temperature, use an infrared thermometer (a.k.a. temperature gun). The [Etekcity 774](#) is a good one.

Humidity

Kenyan sand boas are considered an arid species, and they're very tolerant of hot, dry conditions. In captivity, humidity is generally not something you need to worry about too much, but it is important that the snake has access to a [humid hide](#) for use as desired. This should be a hide box on the cool half of the enclosure with lightly moistened substrate or sphagnum moss inside. It's also beneficial to occasionally mist the enclosure with a water sprayer. However, the enclosure should be kept mostly dry.

To track your Kenyan sand boa's ambient humidity levels, use a digital probe hygrometer with the probe placed in the middle of the enclosure.

Substrate

Kenyan sand boas are healthiest and happiest when they are housed on a substrate (a.k.a. "bedding") that imitates the conditions of their natural habitat and facilitates appropriate humidity levels. Sand or sandy soil is generally best for meeting a sand boa's needs.

[Zoo Med ReptiSand](#) and [Exo Terra Desert Sand](#) are the best commercial substrates for Kenyan sand boas, although [1/20 to 1/30 sandblasting media](#) is a good dust-free alternative. Another option is to use a DIY mix of [60% organic, additive-free topsoil + 40% play sand](#).

Whatever you use, the substrate layer should be at least 3-4" deep, although deeper is likely to be used. In a 24x18 enclosure, that will take 22-30 quarts (.75-1 ft³) of substrate. In a 36x18 enclosure, that will take 34-45 quarts (1.1-1.5 ft³) of substrate.

Feces and urates should be removed daily, and contaminated substrate should be scooped out and replaced. Substrate should be completely replaced once every 3-4 months.

Décor

Decorations play an important role in your Kenyan sand boa's enclosure as environmental enrichment. Enrichment items encourage exercise, stimulate your snake's natural instincts, and help promote overall wellbeing. And, of course, they make the enclosure look nice!

[Décor ideas](#): flats, cork hollows, cork flats, cholla wood, sturdy branches, ledges, artificial plants, drought-tolerant live plants

Food

Kenyan sand boas are *carnivores*, which means that they need a diet of whole animal prey in order to get the nutrition that their bodies need. Juveniles should be fed every 1-2 weeks, and adults should be fed every 2-4 weeks. At each feeding, provide a prey item or two roughly the same width as the snake's widest point.

Although mice are the most common feeders, the key to providing a healthy, balanced diet for your pet snake is VARIETY. Provide as varied of a diet as you possibly can, and you will be rewarded with a healthier, less picky snake.

Prey item ideas: mice, young rats, young hamsters, young gerbils, young quail, chicks, feeder lizards, Reptilinks

It's best to offer frozen-thawed prey rather than live to your pet snake. This is safer for the snake and generally considered to be more humane as well. Prey should be thawed in a plastic bag in warm water to around 90°F/32°C before offering. Use soft-tipped feeding tweezers to reduce the risk of getting accidentally bitten when the snake strikes.

If the snake doesn't take food from tongs, place the prey on a small plate or bowl to avoid excessive substrate contamination. Note that adult males are known to fast for months during breeding season, which is normal and healthy.

Supplements

Kenyan sand boas can survive without vitamin or mineral supplements, but using them occasionally is a good way to help prevent nutritional deficiencies. Every once in a while, lightly dust the prey item with a 50/50 mix of calcium and multivitamin before thawing.

Arcadia RevitaliseD3 and Repashy CalciumPlus LoD are both good supplements to use for snakes.

Water

Your Kenyan sand boa should have free access to a small bowl of fresh, clean water daily. Once weekly, scrub out the water bowl with a veterinary disinfectant.