

Size Matters: How to Meet Your Snake's Needs.

Could you imagine what it would be like to live in a room that's too short to stand fully upright in? What if that room didn't have anything in it to do? Unfortunately, there are many captive snakes that live in conditions just like this and the ones seen in pictures below.



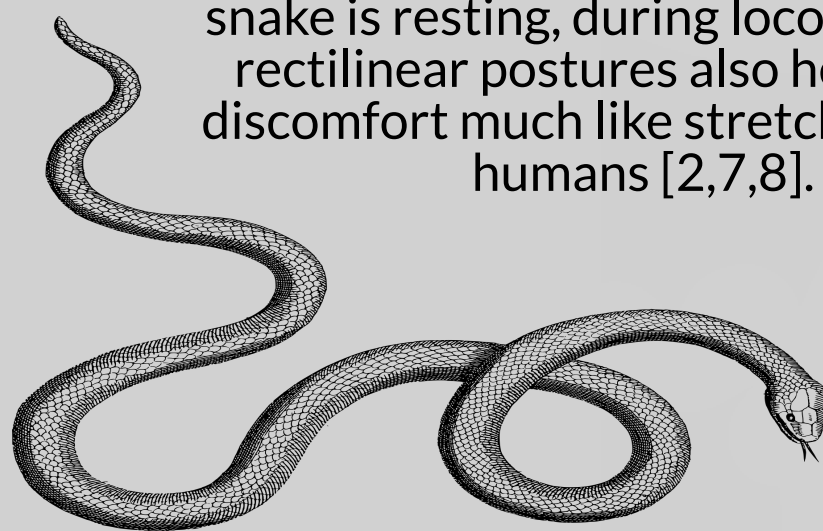
Male Nelson milksnake by snakecollector is licensed under CC BY 2.0



"Cornelius the Corn Snake" by Mark Dumont is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

What are Rectilinear behaviours and why are they important?

Rectilinear behaviours, the act of assuming a completely outstretched body posture, are very important for snakes [7]. Rectilinear behaviours can be seen when a snake is resting, during locomotion and rectilinear postures also help relieve discomfort much like stretching does in humans [2,7,8].



How big of an enclosure?

Common scientific consensus for captive snake enclosures is that at least one side of the enclosure should be greater than the total outstretched body length [3]. This allows the snake to assume rectilinear postures and larger enclosures also allow for more diverse enrichment [2]. The enclosure in the picture to the right is an example of an enclosure with good enrichment and space.



"Snake Habitat" by thekirbster is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Keeping snakes in captivity

Snakes pose a unique challenge to their keepers. Not only does each species of snake have specific temperature and humidity requirements [5], their long body means that their enclosures have to be much bigger than similarly sized animals. Common misconceptions and lackluster government regulations result in many snakes being kept in enclosures that are too small to allow for natural behaviours [6].



Myth or Fact?

Snakes are sedentary and therefore do not need large enclosures in captivity.

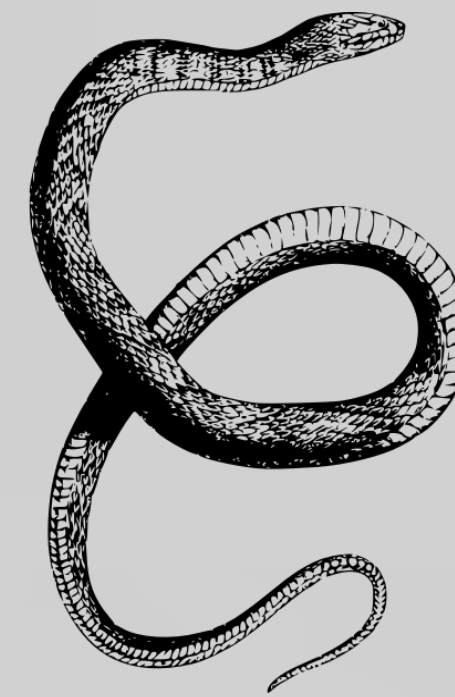
MYTH! In the wild, snakes have all the space they need to hunt, climb, burrow, bask and stretch out completely [1,7]. Some snakes have large home ranges that they actively move through. These are the conditions we should aim to replicate in captivity.

Snakes are ectothermic (cold blooded) and need a range of temperatures to function.

FACT! Snakes will move between temperatures in the wild [5]. In captivity, it is important to provide an enclosure that is large enough to allow for a thermal gradient.

Snakes are scared of open spaces so they should be kept in small enclosures to keep them feeling safe.

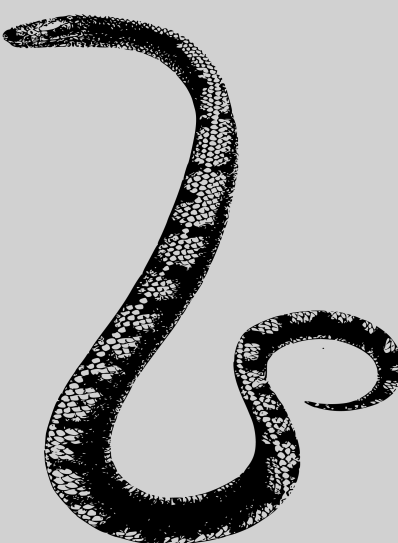
MYTH! While snakes may feel exposed in a large, barren enclosure, if the space is filled with hides and enrichment, the snakes will feel safe. [3,8] Large enclosures also allow for a wide range of natural behaviours including rectilinear behaviours.



"Red Milksnake (Lampropeltis triangulum ssp. ssp.)" by ZedPetter is licensed under CC BY 2.0

What about enrichment?

Just like any other captive animal, snakes require enrichment. Without enrichment, snakes are prone to stress, abnormal amounts of inactivity, and reduced cognitive ability [2,3,4]. Enrichment can include branches for climbing, large water dishes to bathe in, multiple hides, different basking locations, and substrate to burrow in. Snakes should be provided with a diversity of enrichment opportunities [1].



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