

THE MANGROVE SNAKE, *BOIGA DENDROPHILA*.

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DISTRIBUTION

The most distributed genus of back-fanged snakes is *Boiga* - found in parts of Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and northern Australia.

The genus *Boiga* is, in total, represented by more than 20 species. *Boiga dendrophila dendrophila* is found on Java, *Boiga dendrophila annectans* on Kalimantan (Borneo) and *Boiga dendrophila gemmicincta* on Sulawesi. The Philippines are inhabited by three subspecies: *Boiga dendrophila multicincta* (Palawan), *Boiga dendrophila divergens* (Luzon) and *Boiga dendrophila latifasciata* (Mindanao). The Mangrove snake is also found in South Vietnam, Thailand Indonesia, Malaysia and adjacent Sumatra. Peels (1981) gives a Map of the distribution of the subspecies.



Foto 1: *Boiga dendrophila*, Serawak, Borneo;
foto F. Hoogervorst.

HABITAT

The Mangrove snake is found in trees and dense brushwood of tropical rainforests and tidal forests: the mangroves.

WAY OF LIFE, FOOD, VENOM, REPRODUCTION AND APPEARANCE

The Mangrove snake is active at dusk and at night and lives mainly in trees. During the day the snake basks in the sun and hangs in the trees at more than 4.5 m high. It only comes down to catch terrestrial animals.

The Mangrove snake is opisthognath, having two enlarged and grooved fangs at the back of the mouth. The venom is neurotoxic (venom that affects the nervous system). The bite of the Mangrove snake is in general not dangerous for people but nevertheless there are some cases known of envenomation so you always have to be careful. The venom of this snake is especially potent for the prey-animals that are on its natural menu, like lobsters, crabs, fish, frogs, lizards or birds. Further it eats rodents, small mammals (including bats) and small snakes (including its own species).

This snake is oviparous and lays 4-7 (maximum 10) eggs, usually in tree holes. The young are about 30 cm long when they hatch and are identical in colouring and markings to their parents. The dorsum is coloured shiny blue-black with sulphur-yellow transverse bands. These transverse bands, which are interrupted at the vertebral line are broadest next to the ventrals. The belly is uniform black or yellow spotted. The upper and lower lip scales are also yellow, but each scale is black bordered.

The Mangrove snake has the typical character of night-animals: a narrow, vertical pupil, which is clearly visible by bright light. Adult animals can reach a maximum length of about 2.5m.

TERRARIUM AND FURNISHING

The terrarium for this arboreal snake must be very large. The furnishing consists of a great number of solid climbing branches and good foliage. The floor is covered with a mixture of mould and peat with many rotting leaves. Half of the floor is taken up with a waterbasin full with warm water. It is advisable to spray the terrarium and the snakes every day with warm water. The Mangrove snake is usually kept alone in a terrarium, as they are able to devour their cage mates.

During the day it requires a temperature between 25° and 30°C and at night 22°C. Lighting has to be subdued because this snake is nocturnal, and should be placed above the plant. The plants themselves are mainly *Philodendron*-species, that originate from tropical South America. It is a strong plant that can be used as both climbing- and hanging plant. The humidity in the terrarium must be high (about 85%) and can be maintained by spraying warm water regularly.

REQUEST

During my visit to the 'Kölner Aquarium am Zoo' (Aktiengesellschaft Zoologischen Garten Köln, 5000 Köln 60, Riehler Strasse 173), I became fascinated with the Mangrove snake. Since then I have collected literature and information about this beautiful snake. If anyone can supply any further information or references I would be pleased to hear from them.

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