

Captive Large Constrictor Snake Welfare Issues



This boa constrictor died of injuries incurred from either abandonment or neglect after being found at a Long Island intersection.



Most pet snakes are kept in tanks so small they cannot even stretch out.



There are very few placement options for constrictor snakes who have grown too dangerous to handle and are no longer wanted.



Often marketed as low-maintenance pets, constrictor snakes in fact require specialized and complex care.

Boa constrictors, Burmese pythons, Reticulated pythons, African rock pythons, and semi-aquatic anacondas frequent a diversity of habitats, including rainforest, grassland and marsh. They may climb trees, swim in rivers and lakes, and bask in the morning sun. Adults can reach lengths of 10 to 29 feet and weights from 77 to 400 pounds. Their home ranges can be large. A python outfitted with a monitoring device traveled 22 miles in 75 days, yet most snake cages severely restrict or entirely eliminate normal movement and exercise. Even though they can live 20 - 30 years in captivity, the majority of reptile owners have them for less than one year. Some animals die due to poor care, while others may be intentionally released outdoors or escape from improperly secured cages.

Minimum Requirements for Captive Large Constrictor Snakes

- Large constrictor snakes need a lot of space to move and behave normally
- An appropriate substrate, such as shredded cypress or fir bark
- Multiple hiding locations for comfort and security
- Species-specific climate-controlled housing that keeps appropriate temperatures (roughly between 80 – 90 degrees F), proper humidity, ventilation and light
- Custom-built housing (such as a converted room with a floor drain) large enough to offer diverse climate areas within the enclosure (micro-climates), allowing the snake to choose different environments to perch, rest, and engage in other natural behaviors throughout the day and night
- A pool large enough for the snake to be completely immersed
- Animals used for food, such as rats, rabbits, or pigs should be humanely killed to alleviate trauma associated with being confined with a predator and subsequent death by gradual asphyxiation and to prevent the snake from being bitten or injured in other ways

Typical Sub-Standard Living Conditions for Captive Large Constrictor Snakes

- Undersized tanks that prevent normal snake behaviors and movements, including stretching out to their full body length
- Simplistic, clinical environments that are nothing at all like the natural environments snakes experience in the wild
- Breeding operations that keep snakes in warehouse-type conditions, often inside exceptionally small stacked plastic containers no larger than shoe or sweater boxes

Problems Caused by Unhealthy Living Conditions

Abnormal behaviors, such as constant pushing against and climbing up transparent boundaries (e.g., glass), fear-related escape activities, and a broad range of other aberrant behaviors, are common in overly restrictive and exposed environments.

Large constrictor snakes may suffer illness, injury and disease, including starvation, dehydration, parasites, respiratory infections, mouth rot, Inclusion Body Disease, as well as injuries and stress-related illnesses caused by mis-handling, poor transport conditions, and frustration of natural movements and behaviors.

Weak Animal Protection Laws Cause Immense Suffering for Captive Constrictor Snakes

Boaz, Alabama	A dead, mutilated python was found in a garbage bag at a gas station.
Scottsdale, Arizona	Seven neglected reptiles, including four pythons, were rescued from a family's mobile home. An albino Burmese python was described as "vastly underweight."
Stamford, Connecticut	An officer retrieved an underweight 8-foot red-tailed boa constrictor with an abscess on his mouth from a recycling bin.
St. Petersburg, Florida	A badly beaten 6-foot boa constrictor died a few hours after being found in a dumpster at an apartment building.
Saugus, Massachusetts	Someone abandoned an injured 4-foot boa constrictor in front of a Petsmart store in 40-degree weather. The snake had five to six pieces of flesh missing, each piece measuring between the size of a dime and a quarter, exposing some of the backbone. The injuries were suspected to be bite wounds inflicted when the owner tried to feed the snake a live rat.
Greenwood, Missouri	Someone abandoned a wounded 12-foot, 50-pound Burmese python at a veterinary clinic several days after trying unsuccessfully to decapitate the snake with a box cutter when the animal reportedly had gotten "out of hand." The snake received stitches for a laceration that went all the way to the vertebrae.
Albuquerque, New Mexico	Officials seized at least 50 snakes, mostly boa constrictors, from appalling conditions in an Albuquerque apartment that was full of trash, feces, and dead snakes.
Cobleskill, New York	A man was charged with animal neglect after authorities found two boa constrictors and a python living in feces-filled tanks and were underweight (one resembled a belt because it was so flat) and extremely dehydrated.
York Haven, Pennsylvania	Citizens discovered an injured and emaciated 7-foot Burmese python and brought the snake to East York Veterinary Center, where a veterinarian described this as the "worst case of reptile abuse" she had ever seen. The snake was slashed in several places, including a large gash to the neck, and a gunshot wound to the back of his head was surrounded with scar tissue. The snake was humanely euthanized due to the severity of the wounds.
Beaver County, Pennsylvania	A jogger found a 6-foot python with multiple stab wounds on its head and upper torso in a blood-spattered cage on a hillside. The snake, barely alive, was taken to a man who operates a wildlife removal business who treated the snake's wounds.
Orangeburg, South Carolina	Officers investigating a break-in at a residence discovered a 10-foot albino Burmese python being kept in a closet. The snake was removed by an animal control officer who determined that the animal was emaciated, dehydrated, and had several sores. The snake, who should have weighed approximately 100 pounds, weighed only 30 pounds.

