**Kingsnakes & Milksnakes – Care Sheet**

**California kingsnake:** *Lampropeltis getula californiae*

**Honduran milksnake:** *Lampropeltis triangulum hondurensis*

Bold and colorful, kingsnakes and milksnakes make excellent pets for those looking for relatively low maintenance and active companions. They come in many varieties of patterns and colors, and are known for being hardy in captivity. Although this care sheet focuses on the more common California kingsnakes and Honduran milksnakes, there are many different species to choose from so be sure to do more specific research on the individual species you’re interested in keeping.

**Basic Info**

Age: 15-20 years on average, although some have been known to live longer.

Size: Both species are slender-bodied, with California kingsnakes averaging 3-4 ft. in length and reaching up to 6 ft. Honduran milksnakes average 4-5 ft., although they have been known to reach up to 7ft. in length.

**Behavior**

These snakes are excellent escape artists, and for this reason their enclosure should be very secure. Although docile with regular handling, kingsnakes and milksnakes are also known to bite when hungry and tend to be “on the move” when handled. Being nonvenomous, their bites are not harmful or very painful. Make sure to wash any bite thoroughly to prevent infection. Young snakes are especially flighty and defensive, while older animals are usually calmer and less easily frightened.

**Diet**

Known for their voracious appetites, kingsnakes and milksnakes are both what is known as *ophiophagus*, meaning they will eat other snakes. For this and many other reasons, they should be housed separately. In the wild, they feed on a variety of other animals as well. Their usual diet in captivity consists of rodents, usually mice. We strongly recommend only feeding thawed frozen rodents, as there is risk of injury to the snake with live prey. These species should be fed every 1-2 weeks, although they will probably “act hungry” more frequently. They are opportunistic eaters, which means they will likely eat if you feed them, even if they do not need to. They are prone to obesity if overfed. Of course, they should always have fresh, clean water as well in a bowl that is big enough for them to soak in if they want.

**Environment & Caging**

In the wild, California kingsnakes are found in a wide variety of

habitats: forests, woodlands, chaparrals, grasslands, marshes, farmlands, ranches, deserts, and even brushy suburban areas. This is why they adapt so well to captivity. Honduran milksnakes are known to occur in forest floor and grassland habitat throughout subtropical lowland areas of Honduras, Nicaragua and extreme northern Costa Rica. Both species are designed to burrow into the ground, so providing them hides or deep substrate is very important for their care. There should be one at each end, so the snake can choose its preferred temperature while still staying hidden. For substrate, you can either use newspaper, paper towels, shredded aspen, or other similar type bedding. Be careful that your snake does not ingest any particulate bedding when being fed. Both species should be provided heat, with the warm side reaching 85-90 and the cool side 70-75 degrees Fahrenheit. For caging, a 20 gallon long enclosure or larger is ideal as these are active snakes that need space to move and explore. Ambient humidity is usually fine for these reptiles, but to make sure they shed well you can provide a humid hide made out of something like a Tupperware container with a hole in the top. Inside the container, place either damp paper towels, sphagnum moss, or water so they can choose higher humidity when they want such as during shedding.

**Veterinary & Preventative Care**

We recommend a physical examination every 6-12 months. A vet will perform a fecal examination for parasites, and can order blood work and check for mites if necessary. If your snake was caught in the wild, it is important to have it checked out by a vet, because it may have parasites. Other health issues to check for can include respiratory ailments, obesity or weight loss, and shedding issues.