Brazilian Rainbow Boa

What do they look like?
Brazilian rainbow boas are one of nearly a dozen subspecies of rainbow boas. They are medium-bodied snakes, growing to be five to seven feet long. Their body color varies from mahogany brown to deep red to vibrant orange. Rainbow boas have three dark parallel lines on the top of their heads which merge into a dark ringed pattern that runs the length of their back. Dark spots run along their sides, and their bellies are light cream in color. They are named for their iridescence on their scales, which is especially noticeable in the sunlight after shedding. Vestigial hind limbs are present in the form of spurs on each side of the anal vent. Although snakes have evolved to move without legs, these remnant limbs are more prominent in males than females and are used during mating.

How do they behave?
Rainbow boas are generally terrestrial and nocturnal. Although they usually hunt at night, they are occasionally active during the day. Their coloration helps them to camouflage with fallen foliage on the forest floor. When the boas climb in the trees, their light bellies blend in with the light rays coming through the branches when viewed from below. This dual coloration is called **countershading**. Like all snakes, rainbow boas have a Jacobson’s organ on the roof of their mouths which analyzes scent particles collected by their long forked tongues.

What’s on the menu?
Like all other constrictors, rainbow boas suffocate their prey using constriction and do not have venom. In the wild, rainbow boas feed on rodents, birds, and occasionally other small reptiles or even fish. At the Zoo, boas are fed mice and rats.

How are they born?
Most reptiles, including snakes, hatch from eggs. However, boas are **ovoviviparous**. This means that the young develop in eggs that are retained inside the female’s body. These eggs do not have hard or leathery shells as they would if they were laid outside the body. Instead, neonates form inside egg sacs, gaining nutrients from the yolk, which is fully absorbed before birth. They are born alive and shed their skin approximately 7-10 days later. Following their first shed, they will instinctively hunt for their first meal.

What should you know about them?
Brazilian rainbow boas are sometimes kept as pets. However, they do require very specific temperature and humidity conditions in order to thrive. Because of these conditions, only experienced snake owners should care for them.

How can you help?
Rainbow boas are at risk of becoming a threatened species in the wild due to habitat loss and the pet trade. If you are considering a rainbow boa as a pet, make sure you buy only captive bred animals from a reputable breeder. Also, you can buy wood that is sustainably harvested, coffee that is shade grown, and produce that is grown locally. These products do not require the destruction of rainforests to grow crops!