

wanted

BY KEN FOOSE

Gray-Banded Kingsnake

(*Lampropeltis alterna*)

Size: 3½ to 4½ feet long.

Life Span: Documented to live past 25 years old but can likely live much longer.

Range: From southeastern New Mexico and much of Trans-Pecos, Texas, southward into Mexico to northeastern Durango and western Nuevo Leon.

Natural Habitat: Rocky areas where they can access deep fissures and crevices for shelter and to pursue food. Rarely encountered in daylight, they frequent limestone cliffs, breaks, deep rock piles and stretches of highway cutting through limestone hill country.

Captive Housing: A glass terrarium measuring 3 feet long by 1 foot wide by 1 foot tall comfortably houses one or two adult gray-banded kingsnakes. Use aspen or other similar bedding for a substrate. An undertank heating pad can be used to heat the enclosure's hotspot to 90 degrees Fahrenheit, and the cool end should have a temperature of about 70 degrees. Provide two hiding places: one on the

warm side and one on the cool side. A water bowl is also required in the cool end. It should be at least large enough for the snake to put in its head and drink. Provide fresh, clean water every day. No lighting is needed with this setup, but it can be used to enhance the enclosure's appeal.

Diet: In the wild gray-banded kingsnakes feed mostly on lizards, small mammals and other snakes. Wild hatchlings feed mostly on small lizards. In captivity they readily accept pre-killed mice. Newly hatched babies sometimes refuse mammal prey and prefer lizards. In this case "scenting" pinky mice with a lizard, such as an anole, is sometimes required. Once a baby kingsnake eats a few scented pinkies, it usually eats unscented mice without a problem.

What's Available: Gray-banded kingsnakes are easily found for sale in pet stores, at reptile shows and from breeders on the Internet. Most offered are captive-bred, and most have already been weaned off lizards, so they feed readily on mice.

Avoid wild-caught gray-banded kingsnakes because they might not



GEROLD AND
CINDY MERKER

Verdict

Gray-banded kingsnakes are easy-to-care-for snakes. One of the most beautiful snakes on the market today, they readily feed on mice in captivity. Their size and longevity will guarantee you many years of enjoyment.

accept mice as food. Also, they are known to carry parasites, whereas most captive-bred snakes are parasite-free.

Gray-banded kingsnakes come in two somewhat distinct patterns. The alterna pattern has a gray background with narrow blackish cross bands. The blairi pattern has orange, black and gray bands. Wild and captive females have been known to produce both color patterns. Captive-bred specimens have shown up lately with various new patterns, such as spots, blotches and stripes. Albinos are also cropping up, but these are more likely the result of breeding with albino Durango Mountain kingsnakes (*Lampropeltis mexicana greeri*). REPTILES

KEN FOOSE produced his first captive-bred snakes at age 11. With a master's in zoology, he has been both zookeeper and curator. He opened Exotic Pets, which specializes in reptiles and amphibians, in Las Vegas, Nev., 16 years ago, and he is currently vice president of the International Herpetological Symposium.

Wild Reductions

Possibly as many as 1,500 gray-banded kingsnakes have been collected from the Trans-Pecos area of Texas since about 1970. However, thanks to the success of captive-breeding programs, fewer specimens are now taken from the wild.



DAVID NORTHCOTT

In the wild these snakes eat mostly lizards and other snakes. Buy a captive-bred animal that accepts mice.