



Care of Baby Tricolor Hognose Snakes

Xenodon pulcher (a.k.a. *Lystrophis semicinctus*)

Set up each baby in a separate, escape-proof, plastic shoe box with air holes or a similar style enclosure. This species tends to be fossorial (prone to burrowing), so you mostly see them when they are hungry. Slightly elevate one end of the cage, then dampen the lower end leaving the upper end dry. I run a heat strip along the damp side so it will evaporate the water and raise the humidity. Let the damp side become dry again before wetting it again. That assures that mold and fungus will not find a good, wet, place to grow for long periods of time.

My babies have been raised on coco chips (not finely ground coco), which makes a perfect bedding that absorbs water, usually without molding. Cypress mulch works too, but is not as absorbent. Most other beddings get moldy or grow fungus when too damp. I try to make sure the warmest spot of the cage is in the mid-80s (Fahrenheit) for temperature. Adults are set up the same way, but in 28-quart plastic tubs (approximately the floor space of a 20-gallon aquarium). You will usually find the snakes preferring the cooler, dry side. But when digesting food or preparing to shed, they often utilize the wetter, warmer side.

Be sure to place a shallow water bowl in a corner of the cage. Babies are a bit naïve about finding water. Place the snake gently into the water bowl a couple of times a week for the first month or two. Once you notice it is rarely thirsty when placed in the bowl, it has probably figured things out on its own and no longer needs help finding water.

Babies will have fed at least 6 times on unscented, thawed, pinkie mice before I ship them to you. Allow a few days of rest after receiving the shipment before offering the first meal. Buy a package of mixed size pinkie mice so you can feed the smallest first, progressing to the largest as the baby snake grows.

A trick I use for those that do not immediately take pinkies left in their cages is to put the baby snake in a deli cup with just the thawed pink and snap on the lid. It will probably eat within an hour or two if it is hungry, although it might not want to eat if it is ready to shed. Then feed about every 5 – 7 days. The food item should be big enough to easily notice the stomach bulge, but not leave the snake's midsection looking uncomfortably distended. Tricolor hogs grow really fast! As they grow, increase the size of the meal, or use two smaller items, as needed. They rarely regurgitate, unlike many corns and rats that become stressed by too big of a meal or incorrect temperatures, etc. But it is still possible, so don't offer too large of food items.

The bigger they get, the more aggressive the feeding response. Once they are eating fuzzy mice, I usually just feed in the cage instead of a deli cup. But it may be best to use tongs or forceps to avoid fingers being mistaken for food. Although I have never had a baby try to bite me, they do move in a spastic manner reminiscent of coral snakes and many milk snakes. However, once they become used to handling, that behavior diminishes. They become very easy to handle as adults.

Once they have fed the first few times, they are very hardy and easy to raise and breed. I have had fewer complications or problems with this species than I have had over the years with corn snakes.

Enjoy your new pet(s). Please feel free to call or email me with any questions or concerns.

Please note that tricolor hognose have the same sort of mildly toxic saliva that western hognose and other North American hognose snakes possess. The few people who have ever been bitten reported itchininess and swelling for a few hours to a few days after a bite. These snakes rarely offer to bite, although it is always a possibility with any animal. Because of this, do not let small children handle them unsupervised. Also, be sure that your state does not prohibit owning tricolor hognose snakes or other kinds of North American hognose snakes.

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