
VIRGIN ISLANDS BOA 98 Fact Sheet (7/1/98)

Virgin Islands Boa (*Epicrates monensis granti*)

Description: The Virgin Islands boa is a tree boa that grows three to four feet in length. It has a light brown back covered with dark brown blotches, while its cream-colored underside is speckled with grayish-brown. It is non-venomous and harmless to man.

Range: While another sub-species of this snake, the Mona boa, is found on Isla Mona just west of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands boa is found on several islands east of Puerto Rico, including Cayo Diablo, Tortola and the eastern end of the island of St. Thomas. The species has not been sighted for some time on Great Camanoe Island, Necker Cay, Guana, Virgin Gorda or several other islands and cays, though it may still exist on these islands.

Habitat: Virgin Island boas live in the open woodlands of subtropical dry forest on the steep slopes of the islands but can also inhabit coastal forests of low sandy islets as well.

Diet: Anole lizards make up the bulk of the boa's diet, along with occasional mice or small birds.

Social organization: The Virgin Islands boa is active at night and during the twilight and dawn hours. It seeks cover during the daylight hours. It mates between February and May, and the live young are born in August and September. It is thought that the females reproduce every other year, and the young take three to five years to mature. There are 2-10 young in a litter.

Conservation Status: The Virgin Islands boa is listed as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is an Appendix I species under CITES. The government of Puerto Rico has also given the boa threatened species status. There are no estimates of the number that remain in the wild, but it has always been rare.

Threats to Survival: The introduction of non-native species such as the mongoose, rats, and feral cats has caused much of the decline in boa numbers. Island inhabitants often kill any snakes on sight, while new construction on St. Thomas also threatens that small population. The small uninhabited cays and islets where much of the population is now concentrated are vulnerable to inundations from the ocean and storms.

Zoo Programs -- SSP: The Virgin Islands Boa is a recent addition to the SSP program. There are about 107 of these boas in North American zoological facilities. Captive propagation is part of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Recovery Plan for this species.

Conservation: Rat eradication programs have begun on offshore cays slated as reintroduction sites. 28 individuals (zoo born) were released on Cayo Ratones, Puerto Rico in August, 1993, after rat eradication was completed. Long-term ecological and demographic studies are also being conducted on Puerto Rico.

Education: Some efforts have been made on Puerto Rico and St. Thomas to show residents that the boa is harmless and highly endangered.

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