

# Eastern Coral Snake Care Sheet

## *Micrurus fulvius*

By Chris Harper & Greg Longhurst

### **DANGEROUSLY VENOMOUS!**

*Do not attempt captive care without proper training by a competent individual.*



**Size:** 20 to 30 inches **Max:** 47.5 inches  
**Captive longevity record:** 12 years

**General:** In the wild this is a very secretive species, typically being found beneath rotting logs and leaf litter. This species is notoriously difficult to keep alive in captivity. Once set up, the less you bother with this species, the more successful you will be.

**Distribution:** southeastern North Carolina, coastal lowland South Carolina and Georgia, Florida south to Key Largo, southern Alabama and Mississippi; extreme southeastern Louisiana.

**Substrate:** 4 to 5 inch deep sphagnum peat moss is recommended, however a 40/60 mixture of aspen and cypress can be used. The cypress must be a high grade, finely shredded. Some successful keepers recommend using a commercial reptile product called "Jungle mix". The peat moss can be moistened on the end of the cage nearest the water bowl. A large flat piece of pine or other bark should be placed in the cage as a hide spot. **However, NEVER use pine or cedar shavings as a substrate!**

**Caging:** At a very minimum a 20 to 30 gallon tank should be used. Successful keepers report using large enclosures, with bottom dimensions of 24 inches x 42 inches being considered large. Cage height is not a major factor, as these are terrestrial snakes that rarely climb.

**Temperature:** Gradient temps of 72F to 80F.

**Humidity:** Moderate. Never bone dry! Mist cage with clean water periodically. Cage ventilation temps and room humidity's will have to determine the frequency of misting.

**Light:** When providing light, consider that coral snakes spend the majority of their lives under forest debris. Normal light cycles can be imitated; however these are slender bodied snakes that will warm quickly under direct light.

**Brumation:** Prior to brumation, the snake should be allowed to defecate its last meal at a normal temperature. The collection locality of the specimen will determine Winter brumation temperatures and duration. Weather.com has a weather almanac that can be used to determine year round climate data for any locality. Clean water should be provided throughout the dormant cycle.

**Misc:** Keep feces and shed skins removed. Keep drinking water clean! Clean cages are vital to keep snakes healthy.

**Diet:** Frequency 10 days to 2 weeks depend on size of meal. Preferably Ground skinks *Leiolopisma*, Five-lined skinks *Eumeces*, Glass lizards *Ophisaurus*, Pine Woods snakes *Rhadinea*, Brown snakes *Storeria*, Rat snakes (formerly *Elaphe* now *Pantherophis*), Racers *Coluber*. Other species may have some success. Prey items should be less than half the length of the coral snake. Live prey is preferred, however frozen and thawed prey items have been used with some success. Prey items should be introduced into the cage quietly and left alone. In 24 hours, gently probe the substrate to see if prey item has been taken. Prey item can either be removed and re-introduced in several days, or the prey item can remain in a large enclosure with the coral snake for up to a week. The prey item should be fed an appropriate diet while living with the coral snake. Avoid feeding Ringneck snakes *Diadophis*, to coral snakes!

**Force feeding:** *This is a dangerous undertaking that should not be taken lightly. While there has not been a death from a coral snake in the US in 30+ years, recently *M.fulvius antivenom* has become in short supply and may be all but impossible to come by.* With that in mind, we will explain the safest way to force feed a coral snake, as this technique may keep the animal alive during periods when it will not eat on its own. A blanket, folded sheet or towel is placed on the floor of a herp room. All possible routes of escape must be blocked. A Midwest brand (www.Tongs.com) Pro Pinky Pump is loaded with pinkies. Use 2 to 4 pinkies for 1 adult snake. The snake is pinned with 2 Midwest brand mini-pinner, one on the middle of the body and one behind the head. (*Test rubber tubing prior to use.*) The tip of the Pro Pinky Pump is dipped into egg yolk and then inserted into the mouth and down the throat well past the head. The pump handle is squeezed and the contents are injected into the snake. Be careful not to rupture the stomach! The pump is removed from the throat and the pinner are taken off of the body. For specimens under 36 inches, we recommend use of the 25 inch Midwest M1 tong to place the coral snake back in its enclosure. A 48 inch specimen would require the 40 inch model.

#### **Coral snake bites:**

Coral snakes primarily utilize pre-synaptic neurotoxins that paralyze muscles to kill prey. Death in humans is caused by either respiratory arrest or cardiovascular collapse. Coral snakes have very tiny, fixed fangs that must be chewed into flesh. However only a tiny liquid volume is required to kill a human - .025cc. Once a person has been bitten, at least 2 ACE bandages should be wrapped around the affected limb from the digits toward the torso, about as tight as one would for a sprain. Because the effects of envenomation may not show up for many hours, and are not easily reversed once they do, it is recommended that all persons who have definitely been bitten by a coral snake receive 3 vials of antivenom.<sup>(1)</sup> Therefore, once bitten one should always proceed immediately to the hospital with bite treatment protocol in hand. A good source is eMedicine.com.

#### **Effective Antivenoms <sup>(2)</sup>:**

Coralmyn

**Manufacturer:** Instituto Bioclon

**Phone:** ++525-488-3716

**Address:** Calzada de Tlalpan No. 4687  
Toriello Guerra  
C.P. 14050

Mexico, D.F.,  
**Country:** Mexico

**Antivenom Name:** Soro Anti-Elapidico  
**Manufacturer:** Fundacao Ezequiel Dias - FUNED  
**Phone:** ++55-31-3371-9525  
**Address:** Rua Conde Pereira Carneiro, 80 - Gameleria  
Belo Horizonte, MG - CEP 30510-010  
**Country:** Brazil

**Antivenom Name:** Anticoral monovalent  
**Manufacturer:** Instituto Clodomiro Picado T.  
**Phone:** ++506-229-0344; ++506-229-3135  
**Address:** Facultad de Microbiologia  
Universidad de Costa Rica  
San Pedro, San Jose  
Central America  
**Country:** Costa Rica

**Antivenom Name:** Antimicrurus  
**Manufacturer:** Instituto Nacional de Produccion de Biologics  
A.N.L.I.S. 'Dr. Carlos G. Malbran'  
**Phone:** ++54-11-4303-1806 (to 11)  
**Address:** Avdo. Velez Sarsfield 563,  
CP 1281 Buenos Aires,  
**Country:** Argentina

**References:**

1. Russel, Findlay E., Snake venom poisoning in the United States. (1980) Ann Rev Med, 31: 247-259.
2. <http://www.Toxinology.com>