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www.ufaw.org.uk

Animal Welfare 2022, 31: 193-208  
ISSN 0962-7286  
doi: 10.7120/09627286.31.2.004

## **A survey exploring the impact of housing and husbandry on pet snake welfare**

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### **Abstract**

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*Snake ownership is popular; however, housing and care may not always satisfy the animal's welfare needs. For example, snakes are often kept in environmental conditions that restrict their ability to stretch out fully or move around, using rectilinear locomotion. To date, little empirical data exist on the housing and husbandry of captive snakes and how these impact welfare. This study analyses survey responses from 744 snake owners worldwide and explores potential welfare concerns for snakes kept within private homes. It documents the most common housing and husbandry methods and compares the three most common families (Pythonids, Boids and Colubrids). Owner-reported data were used to derive scores for two potential welfare indicators: number of clinical signs of ill health and the number of reported negative (abnormal) behaviours. Using these indicators, associations were tested with snake-keeping variables, such as enclosure size, level of enrichment, temperature and humidity. Owners reported that 90.7% (n = 675) of snakes adopted rectilinear (straight-line or near straight-line) positions or movements. Snakes kept in enclosures > 1 snake length tended to have more enrichment types and were reported with fewer clinical signs of ill health. Some snakes were housed at unknown temperature (7.7%) or humidity (48.1%) ranges or in environmental conditions not in keeping with current recommended guidelines. Corn snakes (*Pantherophis guttatus*) were the most likely species to be kept at a humidity which did not match recommendations which may present a welfare concern. This study's results can be used to target husbandry guidance for future recommendations and care manuals.*

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**Keywords:** animal welfare, enclosure length, enrichment, housing, humidity, temperature