**Madagascar Tree Boa**
*Sanzinia madagascariensis*

**Scientific Name**
*Sanzinia madagascariensis*

**Other Names**
Sanzinia

**Range**
The offshore island of Nosy Be and all but the Southwestern corner of Madagascar

**Habitat**
Lowland tropical forests, dry forests and humid upland forests

**Description**
A large constrictor that varies in color depending on the range of the individual: green to greyish-green in the eastern parts of its range, and yellow, orange and brown in some parts of the western side of the range. The green variation tends to be two-thirds as large as the yellow colored variety and females of both are larger than males.

**Average Size**
Length: 5 – 6 ft.
Weight: 7 – 13 lbs.

**Lifespan**
In the wild: Estimated at 15 years
In captivity: Up to 20 years

**Diet**
In the wild: Small mammals, amphibians, bats and birds
In captivity: Mice

**Gestation**
6 months

**Sexual Maturity**
2 years of age

**Offspring**
Up to 12

**Predators**
Birds of prey and fossa

**Population Status**
Vulnerable

**Behavior**
Although it is considered a ‘tree boa’, the Madagascar Tree Boa is less arboreal than other tree boas, spending a fair amount of time on the ground and using trees only when hunting. This nocturnal snake feeds on small mammals and birds, seeking them out using the heat-sensitive pits around its mouth that enable it to hunt for warm-blooded prey even in complete darkness. The prey, once captured by sharp, needle-like teeth, is constricted by the powerful coils of the boa which restricts blood flow to the heart and ultimately causes circulatory failure.

**Reproduction and Breeding**
In the wild, the breeding season is from November to February, but these snakes are able to breed throughout the year, especially in captivity. Males engage in fights during the mating season as they vie for a female’s attention. The males fight by using a tree branch to anchor their lower coils, leaving the upper half of their body free for the battle. During this time, the females’ color darkens to allow more heat absorption in order to provide much needed warmth for reproduction and internal incubation. Her color returns the first time the female sheds her skin after birth.

The 15-inch-long neonates are born red, changing to adult color in the first year of life. This is thought to serve two purposes: to warn predators to stay away (as bright colors often serve as warnings of poison or venom) and to provide camouflage among brightly-colored tree top flowers. Neither parent provides any care to the offspring and the young quickly make their way to a hiding spot in the trees to begin their solitary lives.

**Conservation**
The Madagascar Tree Boa is listed as an animal of least concern by IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) due to the fact the species is widespread and present even in heavily-degraded habitats. Despite this listing, habitat loss through deforestation for human settlement and agricultural practices has restricted this snake’s range to the remaining protected areas of Madagascar, amounting to just 10 to 20 percent of the original primary forest on the Island. CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) lists this species as Appendix I which strictly regulates trade for species threatened with extinction.

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In September 2003, the president of Madagascar agreed to triple the amount of protected land from 15,000 km² to 50,000 km², and in 2007 15 new protected areas were established. The local people are actively involved in this conservation effort and many find employment as guides in these parks. The Sacramento Zoo supports these efforts by partnering with the Madagascar Fauna Group to raise conservation awareness of this unique island and its rare creatures.

**Amazing Facts**

Although this boa has a distinctly triangular head (a typical characteristic of poisonous snakes), it is not venomous.

This is one of only three boas found on the island of Madagascar.

Some scientists believe the two color variations are actually different sub-species of the same snake.