

## Breeding Solomon Islands Tree Boas

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*By Jerry G. Walls*

Could you provide me with some information about breeding Solomon Islands tree boas? I recently acquired a beautiful pair of orange juveniles that I believe would produce some amazing offspring.

Ian White  
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Though more and more Solomon Island tree boas (*Candoia bibroni*) are being bred in captivity, this is not yet a species that could be considered easy or consistent to produce.

You'll face three problems: 1) the relatively minor one of giving them a large enough terrarium; 2) providing multiple males for each female; and 3) then providing live frogs or lizards for the babies.

These are the largest snakes of the genus *Candoia*, with most males being 3 feet long and females often reaching 5 feet or a bit longer. Minimum adult sizes are about 2 and 4 feet, respectively.

They also are more arboreal than the other *Candoia*, and they prefer a vertical terrarium with some branches on which to hang during the day.

*Candoia bibroni* need a constant relative humidity of at least 50 to 70 percent, and they like to have a large water bowl in which to bathe and occasionally defecate.

Keep them at 82 degrees during the day, and let the temperature drop a bit at night. In fact, to get adults ready for breeding, some keepers let the temperature drop to as low as 70 degrees each night over a period of a month before putting adults together. Always keep the daytime temperature near 80 degrees, however. Most captive breedings take place from December to April, so time the cooling period accordingly.

Sexing these boas is easy. Only the males have large, distinct spurs on each side of the vent; these can be seen even in newborn young. About half the females lack external spurs, and the other half have small spurs that may be partially hidden under scales. Probing is not really necessary, but males do probe to about nine to 14 subcaudals.

Put a trio of these boas together in the largest terrarium you can afford, one with many branches and hiding places on the substrate.

A minimum of two males per female is suggested for breeding, and three males may sometimes be necessary to get the males interested in breeding. Males engage in ritual combat, twisting around each other and displaying their strength, until one male "wins" and mates with the female, often in the branches.

These boas seem to be very selective when choosing a partner, and any random combination of just one male and one female is unlikely to lead to mating. Fortunately, males seldom injure each other.

A gravid female soon becomes obviously swollen with young, at which time it is best to move her to a new enclosure. A typical pregnancy lasts for about 11 months, so a winter breeding produces young in the autumn.

Typical litters of Solomon Island tree boas consist of six to 20 young. The young may be over a foot long when born, which is quite large for this genus.

Babies should be offered a choice of both pinky mice and small, live frogs, geckos, anoles or skinks. Some young will take mice as a first meal, but most need at least three or four frog or lizard meals before they can be switched to mice.

One common method of successfully switching a baby to mice is to allow it to take several frog or lizard meals and then withhold all food for a month. When the boa is hungry enough, present it with a pinky mouse that has been rubbed with the skin and internal organs of a frog or lizard. This scenting method usually fools the boa into taking warm-blooded prey, and after a few scented meals it should take mice from then on.

Solomon Island tree boas are beautiful snakes, and they certainly are worth a little bit of extra attention and patience in trying to get them to breed.