

## **Quality of care advice given to first time corn snake (*Pantherophis guttatus*) owners**

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# QUALITY OF CARE ADVICE GIVEN TO FIRST TIME CORN SNAKE (*PANTHEROPHIS GUTTATUS*) OWNERS

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## INTRODUCTION

- There are an estimated **600,000** snakes kept as pets in the UK<sup>1</sup>.
- There is a **lack of empirical research** into their care needs compared with more popular pets which leads to **conflicting ideas** on how to best care for them.
- Accessible care information often comes from **anecdotal information** shared between owners<sup>2</sup> and from organisations such as the RSPCA<sup>3</sup> and FBH<sup>4</sup>.
- Novice owners report that they **trust vendors** (e.g. pet shops) the most for quality care information<sup>5</sup>.

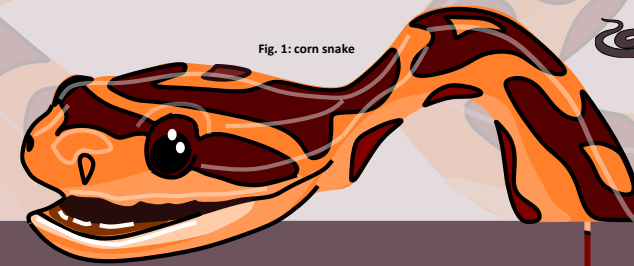
## RESEARCH QUESTION / AIM

- Given the conflicting information circulating on care needs, **are pet shops giving consistent care advice** that is based on current, best practice guidelines?
- Investigate what care advice is available** to novice owners.

## METHODS AND ANALYSIS

41 licensed **pet shops** across England were 'mystery shopped' to find out **what care information is given** to novice owners when enquiring about the UK's most commonly kept species- the **corn snakes** (*Pantherophis guttatus*) (fig. 1).

Care information was **compared with RSPCA best practice guidelines**<sup>3</sup> as a benchmark to **highlight any variations** between shops. Chi squared goodness-of-fit tests highlighted with  $p$  values  $>0.05$  where there was variation in care information.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- Anecdotally, there is **mixed advice on whether corn snakes need UV lighting** (fig. 2), with best practice guidelines<sup>3,4</sup> and recent research<sup>6</sup> advising for the provision. **Shops also had conflicting recommendations** on this ( $p=0.001$ ) on this, with **only 7% advising that the purchase of a UV light** was needed as part of the set-up.
- Whilst pet shops in England only need to adhere to legal minimum enclosure sizes of 2/3 x length of the snake<sup>4</sup>, **best practice guidelines recommend permanent to provide the option to fully stretch out**<sup>3,4</sup> (fig. 3). **Shops had conflicting advice on this** ( $p=0.001$ ) with **only 2% recommending an enclosure >150cm**.
- 73% of shops said no when asked about registering with a vet**, which conflicts with best practice guidelines ( $p=0.011$ ). **The BVA recommends registering any new pet**<sup>7</sup>, should there be an emergency further down the line, especially as many practises are declining new clients due to a current UK vet shortage<sup>8</sup>. There was also **mixed advice between shops on whether a specialist reptile vet would need to be sought** ( $p=0.876$ ).
- Best practice guidelines recommend the use of a thermostat**<sup>3,4</sup> to automate consistent temperatures, yet there was **mixed advice between shops on whether this was a necessary part of the set-up** ( $p=0.639$ ).
- Whilst any pet has the capacity to be aggressive, shops had mixed opinions on whether corn snakes had this potential ( $p=0.007$ ), which may set unrealistic expectations for new owners.

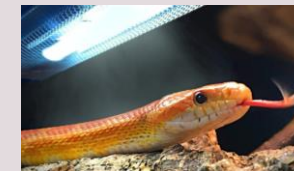


Fig. 2: corn snake under UV strip lighting

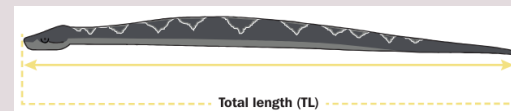


Fig. 3: FBH (2022) recommendations to fully stretch out from snout to tail tip

## CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATIONS

- More funding** needs to be directed into research to **address gaps in knowledge** and advice, particularly **surrounding enclosure length** and whether **UV lighting** is necessary.
- Devise code of practice** for pet shops to use when advising customers as of part of license stipulations.
- Animal welfare organisations** can focus educational campaigns on specific areas.

## REFERENCES

Scan the QR Code for references or use this link:

<https://pure.hartpury.ac.uk/en/persons/helen-tedds>

