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FROGS

Brazilian Horned Frog

Ceratophrys aurita

Ceratophrys aurita is the largest species in the genus: a broad, burrowing ambush predator found only in the Atlantic rainforest of Brazil. The species is rare in the wild and little known in captivity, so its care is based on its closest relatives. It must live alone, eats almost anything that fits in its mouth, and bites hard.

Family: Ceratophryidae Former name: *Ceratophrys dorsata; Ceratophrys varia*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**15-23 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**6-15 years**
Active	**At dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Rainforest and wetland**
Skin toxins	**None known**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**60 × 45 × 30 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-28 °C**
Temperature, night	**22-24 °C**
Humidity	**65-80%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Optional** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Insects, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Development	**Tadpoles in water**
Egg-laying site	**In water**
Eggs per clutch	**900-2,000**
Hatching	**2-4 days** at 24-26 °C
Larval period	**21-41 days** from hatching to metamorphosis
Larval diet	**Other tadpoles**
Parental care	**None**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

About the species

Ceratophrys aurita is a stout, broad frog with a large head, an enormous mouth and a long, finger-shaped flap of skin above each eye like a horn. The back is green or yellowish brown with dark spots. Like the rest of the genus, it is an ambush predator that lies buried in the leaf litter with only its eyes and snout showing and snaps up anything that comes close enough. The species was described by Raddi in 1823.

C. aurita is markedly larger than the other species in the genus. An adult male has been measured at 19 cm from snout to vent, and the largest animals reach up to 23 cm. Females are larger than males.

Unlike *Ceratophrys cranwelli* and *Ceratophrys ornata*, the species is little known in captivity. It is rarely seen in the trade, and very little is known about its care and breeding, so the advice here is based on closely related species and on the climate of its habitat.

The skin has no poison glands. The real risk is the bite: the upper jaw has sharp teeth, and a bite from a large frog hurts and draws blood. When threatened, the frog puffs itself up, opens its mouth wide, lets out a loud shriek and bites. Wash your hands after contact with the animal, the water and the substrate.

Distribution and habitat

Ceratophrys aurita is found only in Brazil, in the Atlantic coastal rainforest from Rio Grande do Sul in the south to southern Bahia, with a few records in eastern Minas Gerais. It is the only species of the genus in the Atlantic forest.

The species is rare, and the number of records has fallen sharply in recent decades. In the state of Rio de Janeiro there were no records after 1989, until an adult male was found near Cambuci in January 2024; this is the northernmost known record. The forest is under heavy pressure from logging, and only about half of the range lies in protected areas. The species is listed as Least Concern (LC), but the loss of forest is a serious threat.

> **Native range:** Brazil.

HABITAT

Ceratophrys aurita lives on the ground in damp tropical and subtropical forest, preferably well preserved, and by marshes and ponds that can dry out. It spends most of its time half buried in the leaf litter on the forest floor. The climate is warm and humid with a rainy season, when the frogs come out to feed and breed. Breeding is explosive: many animals gather and mate just after the heavy downpours in October-December, and the tadpoles develop in water that often lasts only a short time.

In dry periods, frogs of the genus dig down and go into dormancy. Whether *C. aurita* does the same is not documented.

Read more: Rearing tadpoles Read more: Brumation and the seasons

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Ceratophrys aurita*. The climate of its habitat is warm and humid with a distinct rainy season, and the species is closely related to *Ceratophrys cranwelli*, *Ceratophrys ornata* and *Ceratophrys cornuta*, which are far better known in captivity and have similar requirements. The figures here are borrowed from them.

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 60 × 45 × 30 cm, slightly larger than for its smaller relatives, because the species grows so large. Height matters little, as the frog sits on the ground and does not climb. A young frog in a large enclosure may have difficulty finding its food. Always keep the animals separately.

The most important thing is a deep, loose and damp substrate of 10-15 cm that the frog can burrow completely into, for example coconut fibre mixed with sphagnum and fine bark, or a bioactive forest-floor substrate. Avoid gravel and small stones, which the frog swallows with its food. Put leaf litter and moss on top and a few pieces of cork bark as hiding places. Sturdy potted plants can be sunk into the substrate. If several enclosures stand side by side, there must be screens between them so that the frogs do not throw themselves at the glass and injure their snouts.

Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate

TEMPERATURE

By day the enclosure is kept at 24-28 °C and at night at 22-24 °C. Use a heat mat on the side of the enclosure or a heating cable, never a lamp, which dries the air. Always use a thermostat, and measure the temperature down at substrate level. Winter dormancy is not documented for the species and is not necessary; the temperature can be kept steady all year round.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND MISTING

Humidity is kept at 65-80 %, at the humid end of what the genus's common species get, because the habitat is rainforest. Mist the enclosure once a day so that the substrate is damp but not wet, and leave both damper and drier areas in the substrate. Use rainwater or tap water treated with a product against chlorine and chloramine.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

Always provide fresh water in a shallow, heavy dish that the frog cannot tip over and that is large enough for the whole animal to lie in. The water should reach no higher than the frog's mouth, so that it can rest with its head above the water. The frog often passes its droppings in the water, so change it every day. Clean the dish without soap and rinse it thoroughly, because amphibians absorb substances through the skin.

LIGHTING AND UVB

UVB is not necessary for *Ceratophrys aurita*, but a weak UVB tube (Ferguson zone 1) can be an advantage when there is plenty of shade and the chance to burrow. Ordinary LED lighting for 12 hours gives a steady day-night rhythm. The frog lies buried most of the day and is most active at dusk and at night.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Ceratophrys aurita eats almost anything that moves and can fit in its mouth; in the wild also other frogs, lizards, snakes, birds and rodents. The staple diet is insects and worms: crickets, roaches, locusts and earthworms, varied with silkworms. Mice are given only rarely and only to large animals, because they are fatty and cause obesity, and the frog can become so used to them that it refuses insects.

Young animals are fed daily as much as they will eat at a time. Adults are fed every few days to once a week. Overfeeding is one of the most common mistakes. Feeder insects are fed well one to two days beforehand, and they are dusted with calcium and a multivitamin with D3 at every second feeding for young animals and less often for adults. Use tweezers, and do not let the frog swallow substrate. Never force-feed.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is calm and sedentary and can lie in the same spot for weeks. It lures prey by moving its feet in the soil so that they look like crawling worms. Always keep the animals separately, because frogs of the genus eat their own kind, even when they are almost the same size.

Avoid handling the frog. If it has to be moved, pick it up from behind and keep your fingers away from the mouth. If it bites, wait until it lets go by itself, because a tug can cause a deeper wound.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Females are larger and heavier than males. Age and size at sexual maturity are not documented for *Ceratophrys aurita*. The animals must be fully grown and in good condition before they are used for breeding.

MATING

Captive breeding is not documented for *Ceratophrys aurita*. In the wild the species breeds explosively just after the heavy downpours in October-December. The male calls with a single, low, pulsing note of about 1.3 kHz, the deepest known in the genus, and the call lasts less than a second. The related species are given a cool, dry period, after which the rainy season is imitated with heavy daily misting or a rain system and water in the bottom of the enclosure. Whether this works for *C. aurita* is not documented.

Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

EGGS AND TADPOLES

The eggs are laid in water. The number is not documented for *Ceratophrys aurita*; in *Ceratophrys cranwelli* and *Ceratophrys ornata* it is 1,000-2,000, and the figure in the specification box is borrowed from them. The parents are removed as soon as the eggs have been laid, otherwise they eat them. There is no parental care.

The tadpoles have strong, sharp horny jaws and are predators that eat other tadpoles and small fish. They are therefore kept separately or in a large aquarium with plenty of floating plants to hide in. Give live food such as mosquito larvae and chopped earthworms several times a day, and change the water often. The water is kept at 24-26 °C.

METAMORPHOSIS

Hatching time and larval period are not documented for *Ceratophrys aurita*. In the related species the eggs hatch after 2-4 days, and the larval period is 3-6 weeks; the figures in the specification box are borrowed from them. When the forelimbs appear, the tadpoles must have access to land: lower the water level, and add floating bark or a sloping stone. The froglets must be separated immediately, because they already eat each other at this stage.

REARING THE YOUNG

The newly metamorphosed froglets must live separately in small containers with a damp substrate and a hiding place. Give small crickets, roaches and earthworms daily, dusted with calcium and D3 at every second feeding. Move them to larger containers as they grow, and do not use gravel on the bottom.

Health and common mistakes

Ceratophrys aurita has not been studied as a terrarium animal, so the health advice is based on the genus. Typical problems:

- Constipation, when the frog swallows gravel or small stones with its prey. The signs are no droppings, a bloated belly and lethargy.
- Obesity from overfeeding, especially with mice.
- Injuries to the snout and jaws when the frog throws itself at the glass.
- Metabolic bone disease in young animals, when the food is not dusted with calcium and D3.
- Parasites in wild-caught animals.

See a veterinarian with amphibian expertise if the frog passes no droppings, has a bloated belly, has sores or red skin, or seems lethargic.

Read more: Common diseases and signs of illness

Always ask someone who knows

This guide is a good place to start, but it cannot replace experience. Animals differ, and much of what matters most is learned from people who have kept the species for years. Talk to a breeder, an experienced keeper or a vet who knows reptiles and amphibians before you get the animal - and again if anything looks wrong.