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FROGS

Chaco Horned Frog

Chacophrys pierottii

Chacophrys pierottii is a small, round horned frog from dry forest and scrub in the Gran Chaco of South America. It reaches 5-7 cm, burrows into loose soil and spends the dry season in a cocoon of shed skin. The species must live alone, eats mainly insects and is rarely seen in terrariums, so little is known about its care.

Family: Ceratophryidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**5-7 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**3-5 years**
Active	**At dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Savanna and dry forest**
Skin toxins	**None known**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**45 × 30 × 25 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-28 °C**
Temperature, night	**22-24 °C**
Humidity	**50-70%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Optional** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Insects and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Development	**Tadpoles in water**
Egg-laying site	**In water**
Eggs per clutch	**900-2,000**
Larval period	**14 days** from hatching to metamorphosis
Larval diet	**Algae/plants and complete diet**
Parental care	**None**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Chacophrys pierottii is a small, compact frog with a short body, short legs and a large head that makes up almost half of the body. The eyes sit prominently on top of the head, and the skin is covered in small, granular knobs, mostly on the head and back. The fingers have no webbing. Adults have green or brown patches on the head and back, the underside is cream to white, and two dark bands run from the eyes down the sides.

Adults are 5-7 cm from snout to vent, and females are typically larger than males. In the wild they live up to five years; lifespan in captivity is not documented. The species was described by Vellard in 1948 and is the only one in the genus *Chacophrys*, which belongs to the same family as *Ceratophrys* and *Lepidobatrachus* and is the smallest of the three genera. It is rarer in the hobby than *Ceratophrys cranwelli* and *Lepidobatrachus laevis*.

Toxic skin secretions have not been described for the species, but always wash your hands after contact with the animal. As with its closest relatives, the frog snaps at anything that moves, so keep your fingers away from the mouth.

Distribution and habitat

Chacophrys pierottii lives only in the semi-arid and arid Gran Chaco in northern Argentina, southern and eastern Bolivia and western Paraguay, on low-lying land at 70-200 m above sea level. The great majority of records are from Argentina.

> **Native range:** Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay.

HABITAT

Chacophrys pierottii lives in dry thorn forest, scrub and gallery forest on flat land. For most of the year the frogs lie buried in the ground. The first heavy downpours wake them, and they then gather in large numbers in temporary pools to feed and breed. The eggs are laid on the bottom of muddy ponds that are 15-100 cm deep and often have submerged plants. Activity peaks in January, and the males call especially after rainfall of at least 60 mm.

In the dry season the frog burrows down and forms a cocoon of shed skin that limits water loss until the rain returns. The species is listed as Least Concern (LC), but it is losing habitat to agriculture and logging and is collected for the trade.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Chacophrys pierottii*. The recommendations here are borrowed from *Ceratophrys cranwelli*, which lives in the same region and has the same build and way of life. An adult needs an enclosure of at least 45 × 30 × 25 cm. Floor area is what counts, because the frog sits on the ground and does not climb. The enclosure needs a tight-fitting lid with ventilation.

The substrate is the most important thing: 8-10 cm of loose, damp substrate that the frog can burrow completely into. A mix of coconut fibre, a little sphagnum and fine, composted orchid bark retains moisture and does not smell. Avoid gravel and small stones, which are swallowed with the food. Put leaf litter or moss on top and half a clay pot or a piece of cork bark as a hiding place, so that there is a slightly damper spot underneath. Sturdy plants such as pothos can stand in pots sunk into the substrate. Sift the substrate for droppings, and replace it completely when it smells or turns slimy.

Always keep the animals separately. Frogs of this family are cannibals and will eat any member of their own species that fits in the mouth.

TEMPERATURE

By day the enclosure is kept at 24-28 °C and at night at 22-24 °C, which suits the warm, rainy season when the frog is active. A basking spot is not needed, but a heat mat on the side of the enclosure keeps the temperature stable. Use a digital thermometer and a thermostat, and avoid temperatures above 30 °C.

In the wild the frog lies buried through the cool, dry season. Whether a dry-season rest is necessary in captivity is not documented, and the frog can be kept active all year. A rest should be attempted only with healthy animals in good condition and by the same method as for *Ceratophrys cranwelli*.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND MISTING

Humidity is kept at 50-70 %. The substrate should be slightly damp all the way down. Mist every evening so that the top few centimetres become damp without standing in water. Good ventilation prevents skin infections, and the substrate must not be waterlogged.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

Provide a shallow, wide water dish where the frog can sit without having to swim and can easily climb out again; it absorbs water through its skin. Change the water daily, and use tap water treated against chlorine and chloramine. Amphibians absorb substances through the skin, so never use soap or detergents on the dish.

LIGHTING AND UVB

UVB is not necessary for *Chacophrys pierottii*, but a weak UVB tube (Ferguson zone 1) gives a clear day-night rhythm and does no harm, as long as the frog can burrow down. The night must be dark. The frog is most active at dusk and at night and often lies buried for most of the day.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

In the wild, adults eat mostly insects such as beetles, bees, ants and caterpillars, and occasionally other frogs. The staple diet in captivity is crickets, locusts, roaches and waxworms, preferably varied with earthworms. Feeder animals must be smaller than the frog's head. Mealworms and other animals with a hard shell are given only rarely.

Young animals are fed daily as much as they will take, and adults two to three times a week; the amounts are borrowed from *Ceratophrys cranwelli*. Dust the food with calcium and a multivitamin with D3 at every second feeding for froglets and at every third or fourth for adults. Frogs of this family eat until they become too fat, so the amount must be adjusted to body shape. Feed with long tweezers, never from the hand.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Chacophrys pierottii is a loner that lies buried and still for long periods and strikes when prey passes by. It is most active at night. In the rainy season the males call with repeated series of 3-12 loud, pulsing notes that drop sharply at the end.

Keep the animals separately. Frogs of this family eat their own kind, including adults of the same size, and newly metamorphosed froglets eat each other. The frog is an animal to look at, not a pet, and handling damages its sensitive skin. If it has to be moved, use a box or wet, powder-free nitrile gloves, and keep your fingers away from the mouth.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Females are typically larger than males. The male can be recognised by his call in the rainy season. When the species becomes sexually mature is not documented.

MATING

Captive breeding of *Chacophrys pierottii* is not documented. In the wild the species breeds explosively once a year, when the first heavy downpours come after the dry season, and activity peaks in January. The males gather and call in temporary pools. Captive breeding must therefore follow the rhythm of the species: a dry season with the animals buried, followed by rain and a water section where the eggs can be laid, as with *Ceratophrys cranwelli*.

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

EGGS AND TADPOLES

The eggs are laid on the bottom of muddy, temporary ponds that are 15-100 cm deep and often have submerged plants. The number of eggs per clutch is not documented for the species; the figure in the specification box is borrowed from *Ceratophrys cranwelli* and is probably too high for such a small frog. There is no parental care.

The tadpoles are omnivorous: the small ones graze on the bottom and eat detritus and small crustaceans, while the larger ones feed actively in the water column. In this they differ from the tadpoles of *Ceratophrys cranwelli*, which are pure predators. Food, water temperature and water changes in captivity are not documented.

Read more: Rearing tadpoles

METAMORPHOSIS

Hatching time is not documented. The largest tadpoles have completed metamorphosis after about two weeks, smaller tadpoles a little later, and the newly metamorphosed froglets are 20-45 mm from snout to vent, depending on the food. The tadpoles stop eating when the forelimbs appear. The water level must then be lowered, and there must be easy access to land. The froglets are separated as soon as they leave the water.

REARING THE YOUNG

The newly metamorphosed froglets live separately in small containers with a damp, loose substrate and a hiding place. They are fed daily with small crickets and springtails, dusted with calcium and D3. They must not live together, because they eat each other. Move them to larger enclosures as they grow, and never use gravel. Growth rate and time to adult size are not documented.

Health and common mistakes

No diseases are documented specifically for *Chacophrys pierottii*. For frogs of this family the following apply:

- Skin infections from a dirty or constantly wet substrate and still air. Prevent with ventilation and regular replacement of the substrate.
- Swallowed foreign objects. Gravel and small stones are swallowed with the food and cause constipation.
- Obesity from too much food.
- Metabolic bone disease in young animals, when the food is not dusted with calcium and D3.
- Dehydration if the substrate dries out completely, especially during a dry-season rest.

See a veterinarian with amphibian expertise if the frog stops eating without being buried, loses weight, develops sores or red skin, or swells up.

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.