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POISON DART FROGS

Pleasing Poison Frog

Ameerega bassleri

Ameerega bassleri is a diurnal poison frog of just under 4 cm from the humid forests at the eastern foot of the Andes in northern Peru. The male guards the eggs and carries the tadpoles to the water, and the species must be kept cooler than most poison frogs. Little is known about its care, and the species is vulnerable in the wild.

Family: Dendrobatidae Former name: *Epipedobates bassleri; Dendrobates bassleri; Phobobates bassleri*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**4 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**8-12 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial**
Habitat	**Rainforest and montane forest**
Skin toxins in the wild	**Mild**
Skin toxins in captivity	**None** Captive-bred animals. Wild-caught animals can keep their toxins for a long time
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**50 × 50 × 55 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**18-21 °C**
Temperature, night	**13-17 °C**
Humidity	**70-100%**
Water	**Water dish** depth 1-2 cm
UVB	**Optional** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**In pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Development	**Tadpoles carried to water**
Egg-laying site	**In leaf axils (e.g. bromeliads)**
Sexually mature	**12-13 months**
Eggs per clutch	**40**
Hatching	**10 days**
Larval period	**50-60 days** from hatching to metamorphosis
Larval diet	**Algae/plants and complete diet**
Parental care	**Guards the eggs and carries the tadpoles**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
IUCN	**Vulnerable (VU)**

About the species

Ameerega bassleri (Melin, 1941) is a medium-sized poison frog in the genus *Ameerega*. Adults measure about 35-38 mm from snout to vent, and the female is slightly larger than the male. There are several local forms, named after the locality, for example 'Saposa' and 'Sisa'. Sex differences other than size and the male's call are not documented.

The species was formerly called *Dendrobates bassleri*, *Phyllobates bassleri*, *Epipedobates bassleri* and *Phobobates bassleri*. The species name honours the American geologist Harvey Bassler. *Ameerega pepperi*, *Ameerega cainarachi* and *Ameerega yoshina* closely resemble the species and are best told apart by the male's call.

Poison frogs in the genus *Ameerega* obtain the alkaloids in their skin from small arthropods in their diet. Captive-bred animals that do not receive these arthropods are not toxic. Wild-caught animals are considered mild: wash your hands before and after contact, and do not touch your eyes or mouth.

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

Distribution and habitat

A. bassleri is found only in Peru, in the Amazon drainage at the Río Huallaga, at elevations from about 270 to 1,200 m. The range includes the national parks Cordillera Azul and Cordillera Escalera, among others.

> **Native range:** Peru.

HABITAT

The species lives in humid tropical forest in the foothill lowlands and in the mountain forests, in both undisturbed and slightly disturbed forest. The animals are rarely found more than 300 m from a stream. At low elevations they keep to damp places close to brooks, and higher up they are less tied to the water. The tadpoles grow up in small forest pools and brooks. The climate is humid and cooler than in the Amazon lowlands, and the temperature varies only a little through the year.

The species can be very common locally, but is vulnerable because of loss of habitat to agriculture and cattle farming. Collecting for the pet trade is not considered a threat to the species as a whole, but individual colour variants can quickly be overharvested.

Read more: Rearing tadpoles

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Ameerega bassleri*. The species lives in humid forest by streams at 300-1,200 m, where the air is cooler than for most poison frogs. *Ameerega pepperi* and *Ameerega cainarachi* live in the same part of Peru and have similar requirements. In the genus, *Ameerega trivittata* is the best known in captivity, but it comes from warmer lowlands, so its figures cannot be used directly.

A rainforest vivarium of at least 50 × 50 × 55 cm (length, width, height) suits two adults. Build the floor as a bioactive set-up with a drainage layer, mesh and damp soil, covered by a thick layer of leaf litter. Furnish with bromeliads, moss, branches, roots and cork bark, so that there are many hiding places and the lines of sight are broken. The lid must have mesh so that the air does not stand still.

Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate

TEMPERATURE

The species must not be kept too warm. By day 18-21 °C suits, and at night the temperature should fall 4-6 °C, to about 13-17 °C. The difference between the seasons is only 1-2 °C. Heat above 25 °C should be avoided, so place the vivarium somewhere cool, and avoid heat from the light sources. In warm weather a fan and extra misting can keep the temperature down.

HUMIDITY AND MISTING

Humidity must be 70-100 %. Morning and evening it is close to 100 % with mist, while around midday it may fall to about 70 %. Mist or use a rain system and fogger a couple of times a day with rainwater or reverse osmosis water, and let the vivarium dry out a little between mistings so that mould does not form.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

A water bowl with 1-2 cm of water must be in the vivarium, and a permanent water area or small containers are used for the tadpoles when breeding. Use rainwater or reverse osmosis water and change the water several times a week. The water must be cool and clean; natural breeding sites are small forest pools and brooks. A filter is not necessary in a small bowl.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species lives on the forest floor, where little light reaches. LED light with a plant-suitable spectrum and a 10-12 hour day length is enough. The need for UVB is not documented; a weak UVB bulb (Ferguson zone 1) can be used when there are good hides, so that the animals can withdraw from the light.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

The species takes the usual small feeder insects: fruit flies, springtails, newly hatched crickets, the smallest waxworm larvae and sweep-netted small insects from the meadow. Feed every other day with as much as the animals eat in about an hour. Dust the feeder insects with calcium with D3 at every second or third feeding and with a vitamin supplement once a week. Young animals get the same feeder insects in smaller sizes.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is diurnal and lives on the ground. The male is territorial and calls to defend his area, so the animals need many hiding places and broken lines of sight. A pair can be kept together; several males in the same vivarium cause conflict. Poison frogs should not be handled; move them with a clean glass or a small container when cleaning.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The animals are sexually mature after 12-13 months. The sexes are best told apart by the male's call; the female is slightly larger. The first clutches from young females are often of poor quality, and the eggs are easily attacked by fungus.

MATING

The male calls to attract the female. During mating the male holds the female around the head. A period of heavier misting that imitates the rain of the forest can set the calling going. After egg-laying the male takes over care of the eggs.

EGGS AND TADPOLES

In the vivarium the female lays many eggs in bromeliads near the water's edge. A clutch can be over 40 eggs. The male guards the eggs and keeps them moist. When the tadpoles hatch, the male carries them on his back to water. The tadpoles are easy to rear on algae and can also be given prepared tadpole food. They can be reared singly in small containers with cool, soft water that is changed often. The temperature for the tadpoles is not documented; keep them at the same temperature as the adults.

METAMORPHOSIS

The eggs hatch after about ten days. The tadpoles become small frogs after just under two months, about 55 days. When the forelegs appear, lower the water level, and the metamorphosed froglets need easy access to land and a damp hiding place.

REARING THE YOUNG

The newly metamorphosed froglets are small and get springtails and the smallest fruit flies. They are kept cool and damp like the adults, in a vivarium with moss and leaves. They can be kept together in a group as long as there is space. Growth and the time for moving them are not documented.

Health and common mistakes

No disease descriptions exist for the species, so the usual problems in poison frogs apply:

- Too high a temperature, which causes stress and a weakened immune system. The species must be kept cool.
- Fungus on the eggs, especially in the first clutches.
- Chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*). New animals are quarantined for at least six weeks.
- Lack of calcium and vitamins, which causes weak bones and poor growth.
- Still air and dirty water, which cause bacteria and mould.

Lifespan in captivity is not documented; the figure in the box is an estimate based on related species. Contact a vet with amphibian expertise if an animal stops eating or loses weight.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

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.