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POISON DART FROGS

Cainarachi Poison Frog

Ameerega cainarachi

Ameerega cainarachi is a red-backed poison frog of about 3 cm that is known only from the foothills around Tarapoto in northern Peru. The species is threatened in the wild, and little is known about its care, so this guide is based on the climate, the habitat and the close relatives *Ameerega bassleri* and *Ameerega pepperi*.

Family: Dendrobatidae Former name: *Epipedobates cainarachi; Epipedobates ardens*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**3 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial**
Habitat	**Rainforest**
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	**40 × 40 × 40 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**22-26 °C**
Temperature, night	**19-22 °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	**On the ground**
Sexually mature	**12-13 months**
Eggs per clutch	**22-44**
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	**Endangered (EN)**

About the species

Ameerega cainarachi is a small to medium-sized poison frog. Males measure 25-26 mm and females 28-31 mm from snout to vent, so the female is the larger. The back is red, and the sides are black. The species was described in 1989 by Rainer Schulte as *Epipedobates cainarachi* and the same year by Karl-Heinz Jungfer under the name *Epipedobates ardens*; since 2006 it has belonged to the genus *Ameerega*. The name comes from the Cainarache Valley, where the species was first found. It closely resembles *Ameerega bassleri* and *Ameerega pepperi*.

The genus *Ameerega* obtains the alkaloids in its skin from food in the wild, so animals fed on cultured feeder insects are not toxic. Wild-caught animals are considered mild. Avoid skin contact all the same, and wash your hands after working in the vivarium.

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

Distribution and habitat

Ameerega cainarachi is found only in Peru, in the lowlands at the northern end of the eastern Andean range. The records lie mainly in the San Martín region around Tarapoto and the Cainarache Valley, with a few records in Cordillera Azul. The range is small.

The species is found from about 150 m to a little over 1,000 m above sea level.

> **Native range:** Peru.

HABITAT

Ameerega cainarachi lives on the forest floor in humid tropical forest in the foothills, from lowland forest at about 150 m to forest a little over 1,000 m. The climate is warm and humid without a real winter, and the temperature varies only 1-2 °C through the year. The species lives in the leaf litter, among roots and by brooks. The eggs are laid on land, and the male carries the tadpoles to shallow, slow-flowing water.

Deforestation for coffee, cattle and firewood is the greatest threat, and collecting for the pet trade probably plays a part too.

Read more: Rearing tadpoles

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Ameerega cainarachi*. The species lives in the same area as *Ameerega bassleri* and *Ameerega pepperi*, and the breeding figures are borrowed from them (see Breeding).

A pair needs a rainforest vivarium of at least 40 × 40 × 40 cm (length, width, height); larger is better, because the species lives on the ground and floor area counts for more than height. A rain system and a fogger are recommended. Front doors and a ventilation strip at the top give air exchange without drying the vivarium out.

Furnish it after the forest floor: a drainage layer at the bottom, a damp, loose substrate of coconut and leaf mould and a thick layer of leaf litter. Add bark, cork tubes and roots so that there are many hides, and plant ferns, bromeliads and broad-leaved plants. Springtails and small isopods keep the substrate clean.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

TEMPERATURE

By day 22-26 °C suits, and at night the temperature should fall by up to 5 °C, to about 19-22 °C. The difference between the seasons is only 1-2 °C. There is no winter rest.

Above 28 °C the heat stresses the frogs, and a vivarium in direct sun can reach lethal heat within a few hours. Place the vivarium out of the sun, and measure the temperature at the floor. If the room is cooler than 20 °C, a heat mat on the side of the vivarium can raise the temperature.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND MISTING

Humidity must be 70-100 %: about 70 % around midday and close to 100 % with mist morning and evening. Mist or use a rain system and fogger a couple of times a day. The substrate and leaf litter must be damp but not soaking, and the surface may dry out a little between mistings; still, saturated air causes fungus and skin problems.

Use rainwater, reverse osmosis water or dechlorinated water without additives. Humidity must not stay below 70 % for any length of time, because the frog's skin dries out quickly.

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

A shallow water bowl with 1-2 cm of water is enough, and it must be easy to get in and out of. Use rainwater, reverse osmosis water or dechlorinated tap water, and change the water every second day so that bacteria do not build up. Amphibians absorb water and substances through the skin, so clean the bowl without soap, and rinse well. The tadpoles can be kept only in shallow, slow-flowing water (see Eggs and tadpoles).

LIGHTING AND UVB

The light must first and foremost cover the plants' needs: LED plant-growth light for 10-12 hours a day with a clear night. The need for UVB is not documented; a weak UVB lamp (Ferguson zone 1) is optional. Give the frogs both bright and shaded spots.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

The frogs take the usual small feeder insects: fruit flies (*Drosophila melanogaster* and *Drosophila hydei*), springtails, small isopods, newly hatched crickets, the smallest waxworm larvae and sweep-netted small insects from the meadow. Adults are fed three to four times a week with enough feeder insects for all to get enough, typically 20-50 fruit flies per animal. Young animals are preferably fed daily. Dust the feeder insects with calcium at every feeding and with a vitamin supplement twice a week.

Remove dead and leftover feeder insects so that they are not attacked by fungus.

Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Ameerega cainarachi is diurnal and lives on the forest floor. The males in the genus are territorial and call from fixed spots. A pair is the safe way to keep them; several males together can cause stress and fights, especially in a small vivarium.

The frogs should not be handled. The skin is delicate and easily damaged. When cleaning, move them with a clean, moistened plastic container.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The female is the larger (28-31 mm against the male's 25-26 mm) and has a broader body. Only the male calls. The frogs reach sexual maturity after 12-13 months. The surest way to get a pair is to raise young animals together.

MATING

Mating is not documented for *A. cainarachi*. The male calls to attract the female, and the pair lays eggs on land. A period of heavier misting that imitates the rainy season can set the calling going.

EGGS AND TADPOLES

The eggs are laid in a damp hiding place on land, for example under a leaf or in a cork tube, and the male guards them. The female lays 22-44 eggs per clutch. When the tadpoles have hatched, they climb onto the male's back, and he carries them to water. The tadpoles can only be kept in shallow, slowly flowing water; a small container with a filter or a pump that gives a gentle current is suitable. They are fed algae and prepared tadpole food.

METAMORPHOSIS

The eggs hatch after about ten days, and the tadpoles metamorphose after 50-60 days. The breeding figures are not documented for the species and are borrowed from *A. bassleri* and *A. pepperi*. Once the front legs appear, the water must be shallow, and there must be easy access to damp land. The frogs stop eating during metamorphosis and live off the tail.

REARING THE YOUNG

The newly metamorphosed froglets are very small and need tiny feeder insects: springtails and the smallest fruit flies. Feed them daily, dust with calcium and vitamins, and keep humidity high. The young need many hides and a roomy vivarium until they are big enough to be put together in pairs.

Health and common mistakes

There are no descriptions of diseases in *Ameerega cainarachi*, so the advice is the general advice for poison frogs:

- Skin and fungal infections are caused by still, saturated air and a dirty substrate. Ensure ventilation and fresh leaf litter.
- Overheating is quickly fatal. Keep the vivarium below 28 °C.
- Lack of calcium and vitamins causes deformed jaws and weak limbs. Dust the food at every feeding.
- Chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*). New animals are quarantined for at least six weeks.
- Mites and worms require a vet with amphibian expertise.
- Animals with no appetite, sluggish movements or a wasted hindquarter must be examined by a vet.

Lifespan in captivity is not documented; the figure in the box is an estimate based on related species.

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.