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POISON DART FROGS

Ameerega pepperi

Ameerega pepperi is a small, black poison frog with yellow stripes and red, orange or yellow markings from central Peru. It lives by streams in forest at 380-1,000 m and is vulnerable because of clearing. Little is known about its care, which is therefore based on the habitat and close relatives.

Family: Dendrobatidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**3 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**8-12 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial**
Habitat	**Rainforest and wetland**
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	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**60 × 45 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**21-25 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-21 °C**
Humidity	**75-100%**
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**
Eggs per clutch	**22-44**
Larval period	**35-60 days** from hatching to metamorphosis
Larval diet	**Complete diet**
Parental care	**Guards the eggs and carries the tadpoles**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Ameerega pepperi is a small poison frog of about 3 cm. Males measure about 29 mm from snout to vent, females 31-34 mm. The back is black with red, orange or yellow markings, mostly towards the head. Two yellow stripes run from the eyes down along the body, and two yellow lip stripes start at the nostrils. The belly is dark blue with black markings, the legs are black or dark green, and the hind legs are striped. Animals from the south have more red, animals from the north more yellow and orange. There are several local forms, for example 'Chumanza' and 'Río Abiseo'.

The species was described in 2009 by Jason Brown and Evan Twomey and is named after the Canadian conservationist Mark Pepper. It resembles *Ameerega bassleri*, *Ameerega cainarachi* and *Ameerega yoshina* so closely that the male's call is the surest distinguishing feature.

The frogs of this genus obtain the alkaloids in their skin from their food. Wild-caught animals are therefore considered mild, while animals fed on cultured feeder insects are not toxic. Always wash your hands after contact.

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

Distribution and habitat

Ameerega pepperi is found in central Peru. The type locality lies in the San Martín region, 2 km north-east of San Francisco in Tocache province, at 980 m. The species is found from 380 to 1,000 m, including at Río Abiseo, in the Huallaga Valley and in Cordillera Azul National Park. The range is known from only a few localities.

> **Native range:** Peru.

HABITAT

Ameerega pepperi lives in undisturbed and secondary forest on the eastern Andean slopes and at their foot. The adults hide by large rocks near streams and are found on the ground by small waterfalls. The males sit on rocks by the streams and call; the females lay the eggs in the leaf litter, and the males guard them. The tadpoles live in slow eddies and in puddles by the bank. The climate at this elevation is humid all year.

The forest is cleared for coffee, bananas and coca, especially in the Huallaga Valley.

Read more: Rearing tadpoles

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Ameerega pepperi*. The species lives by streams in humid forest at 380-1,000 m. *Ameerega bassleri* lives in the same part of Peru at the same elevations and is better known in captivity; *Ameerega cainarachi* and *Ameerega hahneli* are also close relatives. The care of the tadpoles is borrowed from *Ameerega hahneli*, whose tadpoles also live in running water.

A pair needs at least 60 × 45 × 45 cm. Build the floor with a drainage layer, a moisture barrier and damp soil with a thick layer of leaf litter. The species lives by streams and large rocks, so furnish with flat stones, cork bark and branches as hides and calling spots for the male. Provide many hiding places, moss and plants that thrive in damp conditions, and ensure ventilation so that the air does not stand still. Remove old food and mould, and replace the leaf litter regularly.

Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate

TEMPERATURE

By day the temperature should be 21-25 °C and at night 18-21 °C. It must not rise above 27 °C, as poison frogs tolerate heat poorly. In summer a fan or a cool room may be necessary. There is no winter rest.

HUMIDITY AND MISTING

Humidity must be 75-100 %. Mist 1-3 times daily with rainwater or reverse osmosis water, or use a rain system, so that the leaf litter becomes damp but not saturated. Excess water must be able to drain away in the drainage layer. After misting, the air should be moved so that it does not stand still. Dry leaves and dry soil are signs of too little humidity.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

A shallow water bowl with 1-2 cm of water and a stone or branch as a landing place is sufficient. Use rainwater, reverse osmosis water or dechlorinated water and change it every 2-3 days. Amphibians absorb substances through the skin, so never use cleaning agents in the vivarium. Tadpoles in the wild live in the slow eddies and puddles of the stream, so running or gently moving water is better than still water.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Provide plant-friendly light for 10-12 hours daily, with shade and hides. UVB is not documented as necessary for the species, but a weak UVB source (Ferguson zone 1) can be used. Take care that the light does not heat the vivarium.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Ameerega pepperi is small and takes small feeder insects: fruit flies (mostly *Drosophila melanogaster*, less *Drosophila hydei*), springtails and small isopods. Feed every day or every other day with as much as the animals eat in an hour. Dust with calcium at every second feeding and with vitamins 1-2 times a week. Young animals take the smallest feeder insects, for example springtails, for the first 3 months.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The males are territorial and call from rocks. The species is best kept as a pair in a vivarium with many hides. Frogs should not be handled, because the skin is delicate and handling stresses the animals. Move them with a plastic cup when cleaning.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Females are slightly larger than males, and only the males call. The age at sexual maturity is not documented; in close relatives it is about a year. A reliable pair is obtained by rearing several young animals together.

MATING

The males sit on rocks by the streams and call to the females. What sets mating going in the vivarium is not documented; stable, humid conditions and misting that imitates rain work in the relatives. Give the pair many hides.

EGGS AND TADPOLES

The female lays 22-44 eggs in the leaf litter, and the male guards them. The male probably carries the tadpoles to the water as in the rest of the genus. The tadpoles need clean water with a gentle current, a weekly water change and algae tablets as food.

METAMORPHOSIS

The hatching time is not documented for the species. In the genus the tadpoles typically metamorphose after about two months, a few already after five weeks. Once the front legs appear, the water is lowered, and there must be easy access to damp land so the newly metamorphosed young can climb out.

REARING THE YOUNG

The newly metamorphosed froglets are very small. Keep them in a small vivarium with a damp layer of leaf litter and moss. Give the smallest feeder insects, for example springtails and small fruit flies, and dust with calcium. After 3 months they can take larger fruit flies and be moved to a larger vivarium.

Health and common mistakes

No diseases specific to *Ameerega pepperi* are documented. Typical mistakes in care are:

- Too high a temperature or still air.
- Too little humidity, which dries the skin.
- Lack of calcium and vitamins, which causes weak bones and poor growth.
- Still water for tadpoles.
- Chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*). New animals are quarantined for at least six weeks.

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

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.

The full guide with map and updates: herpy.org/en/poison-dart-frogs/ameerega-pepperi