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POISON DART FROGS

Spot-legged Poison Frog

Ameerega picta

Ameerega picta is a small, diurnal poison frog with a dark brown back, black sides with pale stripes and yellow to red spots on the thighs. It lives on the forest floor from the Amazon lowlands up into the foot of the Andes in Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Brazil and has an isolated population in Venezuela. The species is only rarely kept, so its care is based on the climate of the range and on close relatives.

Family: Dendrobatidae Former name: *Epipedobates pictus; Dendrobates pictus*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**22-28 mm** 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	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**60 × 40 × 40 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**21-25 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**70-100%**
Water	**Water dish** depth 1-2 cm
UVB	**Optional** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**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	**15-40**
Hatching	**15-22 days**
Larval period	**40-90 days** from hatching to metamorphosis
Larval diet	**Algae/plants and complete diet**
Parental care	**Carries the tadpoles**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

About the species

Ameerega picta is a ground-dwelling poison frog of the genus *Ameerega*, which includes many medium-sized to large diurnal species. Adults are probably about 22-28 mm from snout to vent; the exact measurement is not documented, and the figure in the box is an estimate. The back is dark brown, and the black sides are bordered by two yellowish-white stripes. At the back of the thighs there are yellow to red spots. Sex differences in appearance are not documented.

The species was described by Tschudi in 1838 as *Hylaplesia picta* and has since stood in the genera *Dendrobates*, *Phyllobates* and *Epipedobates*, before it was placed in *Ameerega* in 2006. Several forms formerly counted as separate species have now been merged with it, including *Epipedobates yungicola* from the Andean foothills in Bolivia and *Epipedobates guayanensis* from Venezuela. The Venezuelan population may be a separate species.

The genus *Ameerega* has alkaloids in the skin, which the frogs take up through their food in the wild. The toxicity of *A. picta* is not documented in detail and is regarded here as mild. Captive-bred animals fed on fruit flies and springtails develop no toxin. Even so, wash your hands after contact with the vivarium and do not touch the frogs unnecessarily.

Temperament has not been described for the species. The male calls with a ticking sound and short, shrill whistles, mostly morning and evening, but also during the day. The males of the genus defend small territories, so keeping them in pairs is safest.

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

Distribution and habitat

Ameerega picta lives in the Amazonian regions of Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and western and south-western Brazil. The type locality is the area around Santa Cruz in Bolivia. An isolated population in Venezuela may be a separate species, and the species possibly also occurs in Paraguay. The range runs from the Amazon lowlands up into the foot of the Andes.

It has been found in many protected areas, and the population is not threatened. Locally it is threatened by agriculture and cattle farming.

> **Native range:** Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela.

HABITAT

Ameerega picta lives in primary and secondary tropical forest in the lowlands and in the mountains, but also at forest edges and in disturbed areas. It is found from about 200 m up to 2,500 m above sea level. The frog stays on the forest floor, in the leaf litter and on dead branches.

The climate is warm and humid in the lowlands and becomes cooler with elevation, and in the highest parts of the range mist keeps the air humid. The female lays the eggs on the ground, and after hatching the adults carry the tadpoles to water, often to temporary pools.

Read more: Rearing tadpoles

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Ameerega picta*. The species is only rarely kept, and the wide elevational range makes it hard to say which climate the individual population is adapted to. The temperature, humidity and food below are the values recommended for the species. The figures for breeding and rearing are borrowed from the relative *Ameerega trivittata*, which is better known in captivity.

A pair can be kept in a vivarium of at least 60 × 40 × 40 cm. The species lives on the ground, so floor area counts most. Build the floor as a bioactive set-up with a drainage layer of clay pebbles, a mesh as a divider and a damp potting soil of coconut fibre, bark and sphagnum, and put a thick layer of leaf litter on top. Add springtails and small isopods, which eat waste and provide extra food.

Furnish with root pieces, cork bark, moss and ferns so that there are many hiding places, and with a few branches as lookout posts. The lid must have large ventilation panels with mesh so that the air does not stand still. *Allobates femoralis* and *Allobates zaparo* are other ground-dwelling poison frogs from the Amazon and have almost the same requirements for furnishing.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate

TEMPERATURE

Keep the vivarium at 21-25 °C by day, and let the temperature fall 3-4 °C at night, to 18-22 °C. The variation over the year should be small, 1-2 °C. Frogs tolerate heat poorly: temperatures above about 28 °C are dangerous.

Place the vivarium out of direct sun and out of draughts, and measure the temperature with a digital thermometer down in the vivarium. If the vivarium cannot be kept below 26 °C in summer, it must be moved to a cooler room. There is no documented winter rest in captivity.

HUMIDITY AND MISTING

Humidity must be 70-80 % around midday and close to 100 % morning and evening. A rain system or a fogger with a timer is easiest; otherwise mist two to three times a day with reverse osmosis water or rainwater. The leaf litter must be damp but may dry out a little between mistings so that mould and still air do not develop.

If the air becomes too dry, the frogs withdraw into hiding and the skin dries out.

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

Provide a shallow water bowl with 1-2 cm of water, so that the frogs can easily get out of it, and with stones or moss at the edge. The bowl is used by the adults when the tadpoles are to be deposited. Use reverse osmosis water, rainwater or dechlorinated tap water, and change it often.

Amphibians absorb water and substances through the skin, so avoid soap, cleaning agents and chlorine. Scrub the bowl with hot water without soap.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The light is first and foremost for the plants: 10-12 hours a day with LED light with a plant-suitable spectrum. It is not documented that *Ameerega picta* needs UVB. If you choose a weak UVB source (Ferguson zone 1) all the same, the frogs must have dense leaf litter and hides to retreat under. The light must not heat the vivarium.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

In the wild the frog lives on small arthropods. In the vivarium the diet consists of flightless fruit flies (*Drosophila melanogaster* and *D. hydei*), springtails, small isopods, micro crickets, small waxworm larvae and sieved meadow plankton. Adults take *D. hydei* and small crickets.

Feed young animals daily and adults three to four times a week with as many flies as they will have eaten up by the next feeding. Dust the feeder insects with calcium with D3 at every meal and with a multivitamin once or twice a week. Keep your own cultures of fruit flies and springtails so that the supply is stable.

Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Ameerega picta is diurnal and lives mostly on the ground. The males of the genus defend small territories, so a pair is the safest way to keep them. Do not keep two males together in a small vivarium. How the species behaves in groups is not documented.

The frogs should not be handled. The skin is thin and does not tolerate soap, salt and cream. If a frog has to be moved, lure it into a clean, moistened plastic tub, and wash your hands before and after.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The sexes cannot be told apart reliably by appearance, but only the males call. Age and size at sexual maturity are not documented for the species; in the relative *Ameerega trivittata* it takes about 12-24 months. The easiest route to a pair is to start with several young animals and let them find each other.

MATING

Breeding is not described in detail for the species. In the genus the male calls to the female and leads her to a hidden spot in the damp leaves. A period of less misting followed by heavy misting can set breeding going. Give the frogs a hide on the ground, for example half a coconut shell or a piece of bark, where the female can lay.

EGGS AND TADPOLES

The eggs are laid on the ground in the leaf litter or under a hiding place. The size of the clutch is not documented for the species. The figure in the box, 15-40 eggs, applies to the much larger *Ameerega trivittata*, so the clutches are probably smaller. After hatching, the adults carry the tadpoles to water, often several at a time.

In the terrarium the tadpoles can be taken out and raised in small, clean containers with rainwater or reverse-osmosis water. Give fine tadpole food and algae, and change the water regularly. If many tadpoles are kept together, they can eat each other, so keep them apart.

METAMORPHOSIS

The eggs hatch after 15-22 days, and the tadpoles metamorphose after 40-90 days.

Once the front legs appear, the tadpole must be able to climb out of the water: lower the water level and add a piece of cork or bark so it can climb up. Move the little frog to a damp rearing terrarium when the tail is almost absorbed.

REARING THE YOUNG

The newly metamorphosed frogs are small and need springtails and the smallest fruit flies. Furnish the rearing vivarium like the adults' with leaf litter, hides and a shallow water bowl, and keep the temperature stable. Feed daily, and dust the food lightly with calcium and vitamins. Growth and age at moving to the adults are not documented.

Health and common mistakes

Poison frogs are sensitive to heat, drought and poor hygiene. The most important mistakes are:

- A vivarium that is too warm or too dry. The frogs become sluggish, lose weight and lose colour.
- Dirty water in the tadpole containers, which causes fungi and disease.
- Food without vitamin and mineral supplements, which causes bone problems and weak young.
- New animals that bring infection with them. Quarantine newly bought frogs for a period.

A healthy frog has intact skin without sores or red, irritated areas, especially around the vent and on the inside of the hind legs, and a clearly rounded belly. Signs of illness are frequent skin shedding, a bloated body, lethargy, lack of appetite and dull, dry skin. Isolate a sick animal, and see a vet with amphibian expertise quickly.

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.