

Save the Pirri Harlequin Frog from Extinction



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Nearly 2,000 amphibian species are threatened with extinction. Most of them are facing threats that can be mitigated in time to prevent their extinction, and we should all continue to support the organizations that are working to protect these species in the wild. However, perhaps 500 species are facing threats (e.g., disease, climate change) that cannot be mitigated in time to save them in the wild. The Amphibian Ark (AArk) selects species that would otherwise go extinct and maintains them in captivity until they can be secured in the wild. Partner organizations around the world already are working with nearly 50 priority species in captivity and continuously working to increase our capacity to save more.

One such project is helping AArk partners in Panama save the Pirri Harlequin Frog (*Atelopus glyphus*). This species occurs in the highlands of extreme eastern Panama in the Serranía de Pirre and the adjacent Chocó region of Colombia. The Pirri Harlequin Frog occurs in two protected parks, yet it has been classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN and as a priority for rescue by the AArk because of the imminent arrival of the amphibian chytrid fungus. Of approximately 113 species in the genus *Atelopus*, 30 are presumed extinct and only ten can be found in ‘stable’ populations today. We predict that the Pirri Harlequin Frog will be hit (and possibly driven extinct) by the fungus within five years.

Prospects for success with this species in captivity are high, mainly because preliminary husbandry research conducted at the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center (EVACC) has shown that they are readily kept and bred. The rescue facility will be a modified, refrigerated shipping container, a cost-effective, biosecurity-friendly system pioneered at the Amphibian Research Centre in Australia. The “amphibian pod” will be established at the Summit Zoo on the eastern side of the Panama Canal. Long-term management of the facility will be the responsibility of a consortium involving multiple institutions, including the Houston Zoo, which established and supports EVACC to the west of the canal.

Saving the Pirri Harlequin Frog from imminent extinction will cost \$53,000. This includes \$41,000 for the purchase, outfitting, and installation of the facility (e.g., shelves, tanks, lights, generator), and \$12,000 for the first year of operation (e.g., staff, live food, veterinary services). The facility will hold approximately 20 wild-caught adult pairs plus a managed group of offspring for a total of about 500 animals required for proper genetic management.

🌱 Never before has it been so easy to be a part of preventing an imminent extinction. Please, do your part to save the Pirri Harlequin Frog by sending donations to the Amphibian Ark (www.amphibianark.org).

