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AMPHIBIAN RESCUE EXPEDITION DISCOVERS CHYTRID FUNGUS ON RESCUED FROGS IN PANAMA

Panama amphibian rescue tainted by chytrid fungus

The Panama Amphibian Rescue and Conservation (PARC) Project announced today that most of the frogs collected in their inaugural expedition in November were already affected by amphibian chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*), the disease that has devastated nearly 100 frog species worldwide.

The purpose of the Project's first expedition was to collect living specimens of frogs not yet affected by chytrid fungus in Panama for captive breeding. The rescue mission, led by the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and Roberto Ibáñez from the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, collected approximately 20 harlequin frogs (*Atelopus limosus*) and 20 treefrogs (*Hyloscirtus colymba*) from Cerro Brewster in Panama's Chagres National Park.

These two species will be kept at the Summit Municipal Park in Panama while other rescued species were taken to the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center (EVACC) led by Edgardo Griffith. The EVACC was established several years ago by the Houston Zoo, a PARC project founder, after massive amphibian declines were witnessed in Western Panama several years ago by researchers and visiting scientists at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

When screened for disease in the rescue facility, most of the newly rescued frogs tested positive for the chytrid fungus. This pathogen attacks the skin of frogs and has been implicated in the extinctions of several species. The discovery of amphibian chytrid on the frogs at this site means that time has now expired for at least four species of frogs that do not live further east than Cerro Brewster and have been extirpated at all their other known sites.

Responding to this news, the Autoridad Nacional del Ambiente (ANAM), Panama's National Environmental Authority, announced it would join the Project, pledging \$150,000 in support. "Amphibians are an important part of the cultural and biodiversity heritage of Panama," said Javier Arias, director of ANAM. "We are pleased to announce our financial and logistical support as full partners in the Panama Amphibian Rescue and Conservation Project to build Panamanian capacity to respond to the global amphibian decline crisis."

"The project represents an enormous international commitment to put scientific research to work and to stop this disease in its tracks, and the support from ANAM is crucial for this to happen," said Eldredge (Biff) Bermingham, director of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

The founding partners of the Project are Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, the Smithsonian's National Zoo, Houston Zoo, Africam Safari in Mexico, Zoo New England, the Summit Municipal Park in Panama, Defenders of Wildlife and Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. These research and conservation organizations came together earlier in the year and pledged their support to combat the worldwide amphibian crisis.

The project partners are collectively working to establish an amphibian conservation breeding center in Panama to house and facilitate research on 15-20 species that are in jeopardy of being eradicated by the chytrid fungus.

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums has challenged all AZA accredited Zoos and Aquariums to take a leadership role during this amphibian crisis. If this effort fails, one-third to one-half of the world's amphibians could go extinct.

For more information visit: <http://amphibianrescue.org/>

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