



*Ashley Ketchum

African Dwarf Frogs (*Hymenochirus* spp.)

Tiny Aquatic Wonders

African dwarf frogs are small, air breathing aquatic species of frogs that live the entirety of their lives underwater. These unique little frogs are found in portions of equatorial Africa, more specifically from Nigeria, and Cameroon in the northern areas of their range, south through Gabon, and east throughout much of the Republic of the Congo and the Congo River basin. These frogs also occur within equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

African dwarf frogs are small, unusual, dorso-ventrally flattened frogs ranging in color from grayish, grayish brown, to olive brown with dark spots and mottling. Unlike the African clawed frogs (with which they may be confused with), these frogs have webbed fore and hind limbs, eyes located on the sides of their head rather than atop, and more pointed snouts. They are also unique among frogs and toads in that they are tongue-less, toothless, and lack the ability to vocalize, except perhaps making some clicking or raspy sounds. African dwarf frogs are a popular and widely kept species of aquatic frog in the aquaria that can be easily maintained provided water and environmental conditions for their husbandry are correct.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Amphibia

Order: Anura

Suborder: Mesobatrachia

Family: Pipidae

Genus: *Hymenochirus*

Species: *Hymenochirus* spp.*

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, African dwarf frogs can attain longevity of up to 5 years or slightly more.

Distribution and Habitat

This genus of small, primarily aquatic frogs is indigenous to portions of equatorial Africa, more specifically from Nigeria, and Cameroon in the northern areas of their range, south through Gabon, and east throughout much of the Republic of the Congo and the Congo River basin. These frogs also occur within equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Within this range, these frogs most often occupy the slow moving to stagnant, shaded bodies of water including ponds, slow streams and rivers, ditches, lowland rainforest and tropical forest pools, and other temporary to seasonally flooded forests and wetlands.

Origin/History

Hymenochirus spp. Boulenger, 1896. Different species of dwarf African clawed frogs would have different authors first describing them during different years.

African dwarf frogs have long been commonly sold as pets. They first became popular in the 1960's and 1970's, and have spread to the aquarium and pet trades all over the world. They would make for desirable pets because of their low maintenance requirements, novelty, and relatively inexpensive purchase costs when compared to many other reptiles or amphibians. African clawed frogs would be, and are also often sold erroneously as African dwarf frogs, or vice versa despite belonging to different genera/taxa than *Xenopus* spp.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner.

Size

African dwarf frogs are small frogs that typically reach up to 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches in length.

Housing and Enclosure Plus Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Enclosure System: Aquatic. Housing must be sealed and escape proof with a secured lid or aquarium hood. These frogs are fully aquatic and never use dry land, but should still be provided with air flow. Although they may be aquatic, dwarf frogs can climb or jump out of an inadequately secured aquarium if allowed the opportunity to do so. Dwarf frogs can be housed communally, but require a minimum of a 5 to 10 gallon aquarium. Use a quality canister filter and conditioner to help maintain cleanliness inside the aquarium but use an outlet. Dwarf frogs do not tolerate distinct water flow as many fish do. Allow aquarium to cycle for at least 2 to 3 weeks prior to introduction of these dwarf frogs. Live or artificial plants can be for added security and hiding opportunities, but ensure they are sturdy and cannot easily be shredded or uprooted by the frog(s). Provide ample hiding areas inside and around the tank using backdrops, log or cave hides, driftwood, rocks, or other furnishings. Substrate is not required, but larger pebbles or aquarium gravel that cannot be swallowed, or aquarium sand can be used safely with these dwarf frogs.

Also maintain water pH at around 7, and do not allow it to differ substantially above or below this range. If keeping multiple dwarf frogs within a single tank, provide adequate space and food to prevent them from nipping one another. Do not keep fish or other aquatic animals with any species of clawed or African dwarf frogs. African dwarf frogs have simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it in moderated amounts can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, or UTH (under tank heating element). Maintain these frogs within a temperature range of 70 to 80 degrees F. Do not

exceed 80 degrees F, as these drastic temperature changes can stress these frog's immune systems and cause other health related issues. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Humidity is not as applicable, as African dwarf frogs are aquatic frogs.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Primarily Carnivorous; African dwarf frogs in the wild are primarily scavengers to carnivorous, feeding on a variety of dead or dying small fish, aquatic insects and other invertebrates, and other forms of carrion.

In captivity, these frogs should be fed a varied diet including formulated pellet foods, frozen and/or freeze dried foods such as bloodworms, krill, brine shrimp, and beef, live foods such as roaches, crickets, earthworms, small waxworms or mealworms, and other pelleted fish foods. Feed young frogs daily, and adults every 2 to 3 days. African dwarf frogs require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation to their diets as well. Ensure that any foods given consist of these nutrients. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

African dwarf frogs are delicate, soft bodied amphibians that should not be allowed to dry out. As with all amphibians, their skin is soft and permeable; Wash hands thoroughly and avoid any lotions, creams, or oils before handling any amphibians. These frogs are small and delicate, and cannot tolerate prolonged time out of water. As such, they should not be handled whenever possible. Instead, use a fine mesh net to move capture and move these frogs whenever necessary to best avoid injuring them.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Contact

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Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. We cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety.

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