

An Ark Program to Save Amphibians

Zoos and Aquariums Join to Protect Endangered Frogs and Salamanders

Jul 13, 2007 [Dawn M. Smith](#)

Scientists working to prevent extinctions as fungal disease spreads around the world. Coalition brings awareness of amphibian losses and spurs ark facility development.

At [a meeting held in Atlanta in February](#) The Amphibian Ark, a coalition of interested parties from zoos, aquariums, museums, universities and wildlife organizations whose mission is to ensure the global survival of amphibian species, was launched. The project was conceived in the face of the growing threat from a chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dedrobatidis*), which is wiping out populations of frogs and salamanders on every continent. In 2008 the Amphibian Ark will launch the Year of the Frog to raise awareness of the threats to amphibians and encourage funding of their programs.

Chytrid Fungal Disease

Chytrid fungus parasitizes amphibians. It is suspected that the fungus uses keratin as a food source. Affected frogs and salamanders show neurological signs and sloughing skin. The disease may have been spread by African clawed Frogs (*Xenopus laevis*) which are sold as pets and also commonly used in medical research. The African frogs seem to be carriers, largely unaffected by the disease themselves. Once chytrid fungus has settled into the aquatic environments and moist soils of an area it is difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate. To date there is no known treatment for affected animals.

As predators of insect species amphibians aid in the control of disease and protection of crops. And as prey, they feed many species of birds and mammals. But 50% of the approximately 6000 known amphibian species are facing probable extinction and another 33% are listed as threatened. Some [species only recently discovered](#) are found in areas where the disease is known to be spreading, while others are believed to have gone extinct in the last few years as the fungus swept through their habitat. In areas where chytrid fungus has wiped out amphibian populations, overall biodiversity is reduced.

The Amphibian Ark Program

[The Amphibian Ark](#) will initially focus on rescuing populations in danger of extinction, developing captive breeding programs and aiding in the development of facilities in countries where resources for such activities are limited. Research into protecting wild populations from the fungus will be key as well. The long term goal is to have sustainable populations in the wild, once the threat from the fungus is controlled.

The Amphibian Ark is encouraging major zoos and aquariums around the world to take on one of the top 500 species facing extinction, maintain an ark population of the species and help developing countries build the capacity to manage them in situ. In 2008 they will launch

the International Year of the Frog to increase awareness of the problems facing amphibian populations worldwide and raise funds to sustain their projects.

With an estimated 170 species of amphibians having become extinct over the last 10 years, thousands more threatened and chytrid fungus spreading, the Amphibian Ark's projects may be key to protecting regional biodiversity in areas where frogs and salamanders play a significant role.

Read more at Suite101: [An Ark Program to Save Amphibians: Zoos and Aquariums Join to Protect Endangered Frogs and Salamanders](http://wildlife-conservation.suite101.com/article.cfm/an_ark_program_to_save_amphibians#ixzz0xTes0zcI) http://wildlife-conservation.suite101.com/article.cfm/an_ark_program_to_save_amphibians#ixzz0xTes0zcI