



Blue Poison Dart Frog

Kingdom: Animalia
 Phylum: Chordata
 Subphylum: Vertebrata
 Class: Amphibia
 Order: Anura
 Family: Dendrobatidae
 Genus: *Dendrobates*
 Species: *azureus*



Photo courtesy of Tony Wisneski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The blue poison dart frog is found in a few isolated “rain forest islands” in the Sipaliwini savanna of southern Suriname. These old forests are relatively cool (71.6-80.6 degrees F, cooler at night), and humid with running rocky streams.
- **Exhibit Location:** U.S.S. Antiquities

Characteristics

- The blue poison dart frog is easily recognized by its blue color, which is generally darker on the limbs and belly and overlaid with black spots or patches, especially on the head and back.
- Adults are about 2 inches long and weigh about 0.3 ounces.
- The male blue poison dart frog has obviously widened finger discs compared to the female.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** Unknown, but probably around 5 years; **In Captivity** around 15 years

Behaviors

- Blue poison dart frogs are active during the day and can be found hiding among boulders and debris near streams; however, they lack toe webbing and are poor swimmers, so they are never found in the water.
- They have a humpback posture because of a small difference in the backbone and pelvis and have a small tympanum (eardrum) that is often hard to tell from the surrounding skin.
- Blue poison dart frogs can release toxins from the skin that are distasteful and potentially lethal to would-be predators.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** feeding, moving and changing exhibit furniture (branches, leaves, and other objects that simulate the animal’s environment)

Reproduction

- Blue poison dart frogs are relatively easy to breed.
- Males are quiet callers from a position in the leaves or on a rock. Females are attracted to the call and draw the male’s attention by stroking his snout and back in a typical poison frog courtship sequence. The female follows the male back to a hidden spot to lay a small clutch of 2-6 eggs that are tended by the male and probably by the female in some instances. Hatching takes place in about 14-18 days. Both parents have been found carrying tadpoles to a rocky stream suitable for their further development.
- Once at their final destination, the tadpoles are on their own. It will take another 6 weeks to reach adulthood.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** ants (source of its skin toxins), termites, tiny beetles, any other small insect it may find among the leaf litter
- **At the Zoo:** for adults: pinhead crickets, wingless fruit flies, and froglets; tadpoles receive crushed, flaked fish food and algae

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** Vulnerable; **CITES Appendix:** not listed

- Blue poison dart frogs are highly vulnerable to both human activities (illegal collecting) and natural factors such as drought, due to its extremely small range and isolated populations. They are capable of becoming Critically Endangered or Extinct in a very short period of time if these factors are not held in check.
- Predators: adults are preyed upon by snakes and large spiders (few predators can cope with their poison); tadpoles are preyed upon by snakes and dragonfly larvae

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- The blue poison dart frog was first discovered in 1968.
- It is a relic species living in a few isolated patches of relic rainforest habitat. This habitat is remote and difficult to reach, so accurate population monitoring is a challenge.
- Several years ago, National Aquarium in Baltimore Curator Jack Cover and an Aquarium team traveled to South America to research this frog and were permitted to bring back a few specimens. These became the foundation for a nationally renowned breeding program. The program's goal is to maintain a healthy, self-sustaining captive population and eliminate the need to collect frogs from the wild. As a result, The National Aquarium in Baltimore supplies blue poison dart frogs to zoos and aquariums across the country. Ultimately, this program could provide frogs for reintroduction should the wild population ever become extinct.
- Poison dart frogs are also known as poison arrow frogs. They get this name because of the hunters living in the rainforest using the skin toxins on their darts and arrows. Some frogs are more poisonous than others. The toxins come from the ants or other insects they eat in the wild. Captive-bred poison dart frogs are not toxic due to their different diet.

Sources:

- National Aquarium in Baltimore, (2005). Blue poison dart frog. Retrieved Oct. 28, 2005, from National Aquarium in Baltimore Web site: http://aqua.org/animals_bluepoisondartfrog.html.
- Walls, J. (1994). *Jewels of the rainforest – poison frogs of the family dendrobatidae*. Neptune City, NJ: T.F.H. Publications, Inc.