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Surinam Toad (*Pipa pipa*)

Quite Possibly the Most Bizarre Frog on the Planet!

These highly unique amphibians are also occasionally known as the “star fingered toad” due to their star like appendages on their front toes and digits. The Surinam toad is highly cryptic in coloration and appearance, strongly resembling a flattened or dead leaf or other form of vegetation. This toad has a dorsoventrally flattened body ranging in color from brown, olive brown, reddish brown, to pinkish, with strongly webbed feet, and several star like appendages on each of its toes and digits. The head also tends to be relatively short and triangular, with only minute indistinct eyes, and lacking a tongue and teeth. Surinam toads also perhaps best known for their highly bizarre reproductive habits, where eggs laid by a female toad are embedded into her back by the male toad, where the eggs form in pockets and are incubated, develop through their tadpole stage, and remain guarded nearly internally until the toadlets hatch and emerge from the mother’s skin on the dorsum.

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: *Pipa*

Species: *Pipa pipa**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Surinam toads can attain potential longevity of 10 to 15 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The Surinam toad is a highly unusual, primarily aquatic toad species indigenous to tropical to sub-tropical, moist lowland forests, slow moving or stagnant swamps, marshes, and brackish swamps and wetlands over much of the Amazonian Basin of South America including Bolivia,

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Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela, and other surrounding countries of origin.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Most adult specimens of Surinam toads typically reach 4 to 5 inches in size, although they are known to reach up to 8 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof with a secured lid or aquarium hood. Although they are aquatic, Surinam toads may attempt to climb or jump out of an unsecured enclosure if allowed to be able to do so. These toads are fully aquatic and never use dry land. A single adult Surinam toad can be kept in a minimum of a deep, 20 to 30 gallon long aquarium or similar sized appropriate aquatic enclosure. Use a quality canister filter and conditioner to help maintain cleanliness inside the aquarium but use an outlet. Surinam toads 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 your Surinam toad. 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 toads. 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 that cannot be swallowed, or aquarium sand can be used safely with Surinam toads. In general, Surinam toads can be voracious feeders, and if keeping multiple toads 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 these toads.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Suriname toads 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, submersible water heater, or UTH (under tank heating element). Maintain these toads within a water temperature range of 78 to 80 degrees F, but do not expose these toads to drastic temperature changes above or below this range, as their immune systems and physiology will not tolerate such temperature changes and can lead to other health issues as well. 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.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Primarily Carnivorous; Surinam toads in the wild are primarily cryptic ambush predators that are carnivorous to scavengers, feeding on a variety of dead or dying small fish, smaller amphibians, aquatic insects and other invertebrates, and other forms of carrion, or dead or decaying animal matter through suction feeding. In captivity, these unusual toads tend to be voracious eaters, and will ambush and consume nearly anything they can capture and ingest. In captivity, these toads will readily accept a varied diet including formulated pellet foods, frozen and/or freeze dried foods such as bloodworms, krill, and beef, live foods such as roaches,

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crickets, earthworms, mealworms, waxworms, redworms, and nightcrawlers, and other pelleted fish foods. They are known to exhibit cannibalism, and housing toads of differing sizes together in the same enclosure is not recommended for this reason. Feed young toads daily, and adults every 2 to 3 days. As with other aquatic frog and toad species, Surinam toads require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation to their diets as well. Ensure that any foods given consist of these elements. 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

Surinam toads are delicate, soft bodied amphibians. As with all amphibians, their skin is soft and permeable; Wash hands thoroughly and avoid any lotions, creams, or oils before handling any amphibian. This species can be easily stressed by handling, and therefore handling these toads is typically not necessary or recommended in most case. Any handling that is done should be minimal whenever possible and only when absolutely necessary. Use a fine mesh net to move capture and move these toads whenever necessary to best avoid injuring them. This is a species that is better suited for viewing rather than handling overall.

****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

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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