



Surinam Horned Frogs

Ceratophrys cornuta

INTERMEDIATE • 4–5 IN ADULT • 10–15 YR LIFESPAN • NOCTURNAL AMBUSER • AMAZON BASIN

The pacman frog you graduate to, not the one you start with. The Surinam horned frog is a squat Amazonian ambusher that spends its life half-buried in leaf litter, waiting for something to walk past a mouth nearly as wide as it is. It asks more than the common pacmans do: wetter, fussier, and often wild-caught rather than captive-bred. Get it right and it is yours for ten to fifteen years. Beautiful frog, poor first amphibian.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Intermediate
Adult size	4–5 inches
Ambient temp	75–82 °F
Warm spot	82–85 °F
Night drop	70–74 °F
Humidity	70–90%, 80%+ adults
UVB	Low level, beneficial
Diet	Carnivore, every 5–7 days
Lifespan	10–15 years



The horns over the eyes are this species' signature. Captive-bred stock stays scarce at NARBC shows next to the common pacman frogs.
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01

Watch It, Don't Handle It

Horned frogs are ambush predators. A 4–5 inch adult spends the day dug into damp litter with only the eyes and those horns showing, and it is a watch-it animal, not a hold-it animal. Their skin absorbs whatever it touches, so hands go in wet, clean and free of soap, and only when there is a reason. Expect a hard lunge at anything that moves near the mouth, including fingers. That is reflex, not malice.

02

One Frog, One Box

Every stage here is horizontal. A horned frog barely travels and climbs nothing, so floor area beats height at every size. Adults need 18×18×12 at minimum and do better at 24×18×18. Racks can work, but only if the tub still takes deep substrate, holds humidity and lets you check the warm end. **Never house two horned frogs together: they will eat each other, and the smaller one loses.** One frog, one enclosure, for life.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	8×8×8	12×8×8	More humidity-sensitive than the common pacmans; watch moisture daily.
Juvenile	12×12×8	18×12×12	Less captive-bred availability; many on offer are wild-caught.
Subadult	18×12×12	18×18×12	More delicate than the common pacmans; do not slack on humidity now.
Adult	18×18×12	24×18×18	Amazonian species: hold humidity at 80% or better. Floor space over height.

Minimums and preferred footprints from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Every stage is horizontal: floor area matters, height does not.

03

Heat, Light and the Night Drop

Keep the enclosure at 75–82 °F through the day with one warmer end at 82–85 °F, and let it fall to 70–74 °F at night. That night drop is part of the care, not a failure of it. Low-level UVB is beneficial rather than required, so a weak linear bulb over one end is a fair upgrade. Heat mats belong on a side wall, never underneath a frog that burrows, and every heat source runs through a thermostat. Skip heat rocks entirely.

04

Humidity and Safe Water

Humidity is what decides whether this frog thrives. Hold it between 70% and 90%, and for an adult aim near the top of that band, 80% or better. This is an Amazonian animal and less forgiving of dry air than the common pacmans. Every drop of water it meets must be dechlorinated, because tap chlorine and chloramine cross amphibian skin directly. Give a shallow dish it can sit in without swimming, and change it daily.

05

Substrate and Leaf Litter

Give it something to disappear into. A moisture-holding bed of coconut fiber, topsoil and sphagnum, deep enough that the frog vanishes when it digs in, is the whole point. Cover the surface with leaf litter; that is the disguise this species evolved for. No sand, no gravel, no bark chips a frog can swallow while lunging at food. Live plants and a springtail colony turn the box bioactive and make humidity far easier to hold.

06

Feeding

Feed every 5–7 days and expect the strike to be violent. Insects should carry the diet: roaches, crickets, hornworms and nightcrawlers, dusted with calcium. Mice belong in the rotation as an occasional item, not a staple; a rodent every week builds an obese frog. The wild diet includes other frogs, which is a fact about the species, not a shopping list. Offer food on tongs or in a dish so the frog does not swallow its bedding.

07

Health Red Flags

Learn the belly. A red or bruised flush across the underside and thighs points to bacterial infection, and that is a vet visit now, not a wait-and-see. Watch for bloating that will not go down, cloudy or shed-stuck skin, and a frog that sits out in the open instead of burrowing. A prolapse after a big meal is an emergency, not something to push back in. Wild-caught imports need a fecal check early. Find a vet who sees amphibians before you need one.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual - when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.