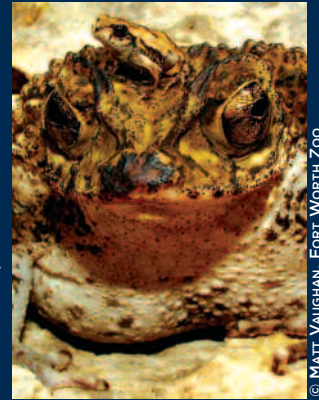




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ADDRESSING THE GLOBAL AMPHIBIAN CRISIS: The Amphibian Taxon Advisory Group Regional Response Plan

By Diane Barber

I was excited when I first heard that AZA was dedicating an issue of *Connect* to amphibians. However, I must admit that when I sat down to write this article I really didn't know where to begin. The past six months, ATAG has been in high gear, formulating a sound plan to address the amphibian crisis in a short period of time. During the process I felt like a novelist with a serious case of writer's block while the masses clamored for the next big sequel! But, by October 2006, a regional response plan was completed and distributed to help provide direction to AZA institutions.

By now, most have heard the staggering statistics regarding the massive amphibian declines the world is witnessing. Nearly one half of the world's amphibians are disappearing, and we have been called to respond. Many zoos and aquariums have stepped forward to develop and support amphibian projects. However, as impressive as this response has been, it is not enough. We need 100 percent participation from AZA facilities to make significant progress toward recovery efforts. Now that a plan is in place, we must act!

ATAG has been working closely with CBSG, WAZA, IUCN/SSC Amphibian Specialist Group (ASG) and other conservation organizations to formulate a tactical response. Phase one of the ATAG Declining Amphibian Regional Response Plan (DARRP) proposes that institutions dedicate more space to North American species. The ATAG recognizes that the majority of U.S. zoos focus primarily upon exotic amphibians, but there is an immediate need to be proactive regarding species that live in our own backyard. The ATAG is not suggesting that current amphibian programs be abandoned, nor is it trying to lessen the importance of species recovery in other parts of the world. However, resources are limited and North American species are in jeopardy. There are 261 described species of amphibians in the United States and 52 of these are threatened. Among North American amphibians, 186 species are salamanders, constituting 35 percent of the world's known salamander species. If exotic species take the lion's share of AZA facility resources, there will be little support for recovery of amphibians in North America.

When the ATAG Steering Committee originally met to formulate a plan of action, it was difficult to determine which species would benefit most from zoo and aquarium support. The IUCN has urged that "all Critically Endangered (CR) and Extinct in the Wild (EW) taxa should be subject to *ex-situ* management to insure recovery of wild populations." Under this directive, ATAG has been asked to prioritize and help manage 353 Critically Endangered species (Appendix II) within North America, Meso and South America and the Caribbean. Naturally, our initial concern is to insure stability and recovery of North American populations. Therefore, our primary decree is to facilitate the recovery of the Wyoming toad (EW), Mississippi gopher frog (CR), Ramsey Canyon leopard frog (CR) and the mountain yellow-legged frog (CR).

In addition to these four critical species, the ATAG has identified five major "hot" zones of particular concern by analyzing the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (www.iucnredlist.org) and the Global Amphibian Assessment (www.globalamphibians.org). These zones encompass a large portion of the habitat necessary for

endangered amphibians in North America: Southwestern *Ranids*, West Coast *montane Ranids* and *Bufo*nids, Stream and Cave salamanders, Appalachian Plethodontids and *Cryptobranchids*, and Mexican *Ambystomids*.

ATAG is asking institutions to seriously evaluate the type of resources each can offer amphibian conservation efforts, especially for the "critical four." There is already an SSP program in place for the Wyoming toad, but it still requires additional support, as do the other CR species. In addition, institutions are asked to pool resources with other facilities to form regional consortiums that address projects within identified "hot" zones, send staff *in-situ* to provide technical support, create educational material, or to contribute funds to ATAG in support of research or for the purchase of emergency response equipment.

It is hoped that as this process evolves, more institutions will actively participate in amphibian conservation. It is imperative that we take a proactive stance and amass a dedicated front. The ATAG will strive to serve AZA institutions as a guide and resource during this global movement, but it is important that momentum continue and zoos and aquariums commit staff and resources to aid for years to come. Hopefully, this issue of *Connect* will spur new ideas and provide additional incentive to support programs that are already in place.

If your institution would like to be listed as a resource for any potential projects, or would like to participate in any current programs for Critically Endangered or Endangered species, please contact an ATAG steering committee member: Diane Barber, Fort Worth Zoo; Andy Snider, Chaffee Zoological Gardens of Fresno; Brint Spencer, Philadelphia Zoo; Bruce Foster, Central Park Zoo; Craig Berg, Milwaukee County Zoo; Jessi Krebs, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo; Bob Johnson, Toronto Zoo.

Additional Resources:

CBSG, WAZA, and the IUCN/SSC Amphibian Specialist Group (ASG) have formed an Amphibian Ark (A-Ark) to help the zoo community save as many species as possible by providing global coordination, technical guidance, training, necessary linkages to other IUCN groups and communications. For more information, visit their Web site at: www.cbsg.org

ATAG RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AZA ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS:

- Create space for and channel resources to support North American species. Support one of the "critical four": Wyoming toad, Mississippi gopher frog, Ramsey Canyon frog or mountain yellow-legged frog
- Continue to support SSP/PMP amphibian programs and regional projects (Panamanian golden frog (CR), Puerto Rican crested toad (CR), Wyoming toad (EW), Mississippi gopher frog (CR), blind cave salamander (E), etc.)
- If your institution cannot participate in recovery efforts for the "critical four," contact local government agencies and become involved in regional projects, particularly those involving endangered species within identified "hot" zones
- If currently involved in a reintroduction program, quarantine those species from the rest of the collection and implement pre-release screenings

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- Modify current amphibian holding facilities to include isolation rooms for several species, and/or create quarantine rooms in new facilities (see Quarantine Recommendations, Appendix V)
- Provide long-term financial, technical, physical and logistical support to programs and projects identified as a priority by the ATAG
- Create and/or support *in-situ* amphibian conservation centers
- Expand and support capacity building at home institutions and in range countries. Upgrade and expand amphibian facilities and send staff to participate in training courses or internships at institutions with existing capacity, or sponsor someone in need
- Support field research, rescue programs and existing local amphibian conservation projects
- Participate in global public awareness campaigns such as CBSG's A-ARK "2008: Year of the Frog," and AZA/ATAG initiatives, zoo Web sites, graphics, education materials and media releases
- Designate an ATAG IR for your facility
- Most importantly: TAKE INITIATIVE AND COMMIT TO SAVE AT LEAST ONE SPECIES OF CRITICALLY ENDANGERED AMPHIBIANS TODAY!

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