

# Pac Man Frog / Ornate Horned Frog

*Ceratophrys ornata*



**LIFE SPAN:** about 6-10 years

**AVERAGE SIZE:** 6-7 inches

Males are a bit smaller than females.

**CAGE TEMPS:** 81°

**HUMIDITY:** 60-70%

\* If temp falls below 70° at night, may need supplemental infrared or ceramic heat

**WILD HISTORY:** Native to the rainforests of Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina of South America.

**PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:** The frogs get their common name, “Pac Man Frog” from their round, plump shape and large mouths, which make them resemble the video game character. Their large eyes stay open while they are sleeping.

Pac mans are available in many patterns and colors, the most common being yellow and green, with mottled spots/patches. These colors and patterns prove to be perfect camouflage for hiding on the rainforest floor, waiting for prey to happen by.

Because of their delicate and porous skin, handling your frog is not recommended.

**NORMAL BEHAVIOR & INTERACTION:** Pac mans are relatively inactive and sedentary. They are beautiful and entertaining pets, but they have no desire to be handled. Handling a pac man frog is very stressful for it and may result in illness. Their skin is very sensitive, being a secondary breathing organ. Some pac mans are diurnal; some are crepuscular.

**NOTE:** DO NOT house Pac Man frogs with others of their species or any other species to prevent cannibalism – your pac man will most likely eat any unsuspecting visitor. Each species may also harbor different parasites/protozoans/bacteria (even a healthy reptile harbors a small amount at all times), which may make each other ill.

**FEEDING:** Carnivores; live food

Protein sources such as: gut-loaded crickets, small feeder fish, earthworms, wax worms and pinky mice (dusted with a supplement every other feeding) should be part of their diet.

Wild caught insects should never be fed, since they can carry disease. All insects should be gut loaded (fed a nutritious diet about 24-hours before being offered to your frog – see our cricket care sheet).

When feeding larger insects to your pet, try to make sure the insects have recently molted, as an insect with a large, hard exoskeleton is difficult to digest and may cause impactions.

Your pac man frog is programmed to snap at anything that happens by its mouth. Considering the fact that they DO have teeth, take care that you are not mistakenly bitten. It is always safest to feed you frog with tongs, just in case. This behavior has earned the pac man the label of “vicious and aggressive.” This is not true; they are just instinctually grabby hunters.

**SUPPLEMENTS:** Dust food with calcium supplement and vitamin supplements. As a rule, a growing juvenile's food (and a pregnant/gravid female's) should be dusted more often than an adult's. Follow your veterinarian's instructions for applying supplements to avoid over-supplementing food.

Our veterinarian recommends dusting insects with a good quality calcium supplement fortified with vitamin D3, 2-3 times a week. (Avoid using a calcium supplement with added phosphorous, unless specifically directed by your veterinarian, since this can promote kidney disease.)

Always consult your veterinarian for specific directions on supplementing your pet's food, since there are many variables that go into determining the best supplementation regimen for each animal.

**WATER:** All water given to amphibians for bathing, swimming or drinking, as well as water used for misting must be 100% free of chlorine and heavy metals. (Not all home water filtration systems remove 100% of the chlorine and heavy metals from tap water). We recommend that you use unflavored bottled drinking water or bottled natural spring water; never untreated tap water. If tap water is used, you should treat it with a de-chlorinating treatment. De-chlorinator is available in the fish department. If you do not want to chemically de-chlorinate the water, you can leave an open container of tap water out for at least 24 hours. Do not use distilled water, which can cause severe medical problems, since it lacks minerals that are essential to important body functions.

Change the water in your frog's enclosure every one to two days.

A daily misting or two with chlorine-free water will also be appreciated. However, care should be taken not to allow the enclosure to become damp. Also, do not mist less than two hours before turning the heat lamps off for the day.

**SHEDDING:** Frogs do shed their skin. Your frog may crunch his body up into an uncomfortable-looking crouching position. Then he will puff his body up to try to loosen the skin, then he may convulse as if he is coughing! Your pac man may also swipe at his eyes or body with his feet, sliding the old skin off his body. As the skin is shed, he will eat it. It has many good nutrients, and your frog knows it!

If the tank humidity is low, your frog may not shed properly.

To create more humidity, the entire tank can be lightly spray misted twice a day during shedding time. Spray once in the morning and once later in the day. Make sure the later spray dries completely before lights go off for the night, as the droplets may not have time to dry and may contribute to respiratory disease.

### **RECOMMENDED SUPPLIES:**

- \*10 gallon glass tank
- \*Glass aquarium cover or metal mesh tank cover
- \*Large shallow water dish, a pac man can drown in a deep dish.
- \*Temperature / humidity gauge – do not stick to side of tank
- \*Hide house
- \*Coconut fiber substrate, moistened
- \*UVB bulb and housing
- \*Pac Man Frog Book
- \*Calcium supplement

**HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT:** Pac man frogs are ectothermic, or cold-blooded, therefore the environments we create for them must be heated properly to keep them healthy. Your frog needs a warm, humid environment in its enclosure.

A ten-gallon glass tank with a metal mesh cover will work fine.

If you lose too much humidity through the metal mesh cover, you can tape plastic sheeting (thick plastic bag – preferably translucent) over part of the mesh. However, be sure NOT to block the UVB light with the plastic, as it will filter out all the important rays before they reach you pet(s). Also, be sure that any hot lights do not come in contact with the plastic, or sit too closely to the plastic.

**HEAT LAMP:** A heat lamp is not necessary for your frog enclosure, unless your household temperatures fall below 70 degrees at night. In that case, you will need to apply supplemental heat in the form of a ceramic heat emitter or an infrared bulb.

**HEAT PAD:** Reptile heat pads can be adhered directly onto the underside of the glass bottom of the tank. Stick it directly on the glass on one of the very far ends of the tank (opposite the water dish). For safety reasons, make sure to attach the rubber feet (contained in the box) at all four corners of the underside of the tank. This will allow air to circulate underneath the tank and prevent the heat from being trapped under the tank. Leave the heat pad ON 24 hours a day.

Heat pads specifically manufactured for reptiles are safe to leave on 24 hours a day (which should be done for these enclosures). DO NOT use reptile heat rocks. They heat unevenly and have caused severe thermal burns in reptiles. A human-grade heat pad may be used on the low to medium setting. Do be sure to allow for proper ventilation for safety reasons. \*\*\*\*Be sure to purchase a heat pad without automatic shut-off, which are still available.

**UVB LIGHT:** Exposure to UVB (ultraviolet B) light is critical in allowing an animal to synthesize vitamin D<sub>3</sub> in their skin and metabolize calcium in their body.

If an animal is not exposed to an adequate level of UVB light, it will gradually develop physical problems from the result of mineral deficiencies such as low blood calcium (hypocalcaemia), soft eggs (females), stunted growth and metabolic bone disorder, which can be fatal if left untreated. In addition, recent studies have linked sub-optimal vitamin D levels with poor immune system function.

All day-active (diurnal) indoor reptiles, amphibians, birds and hermit crabs should be allowed self-selected exposure to UVB lighting for up to 8-12 hours a day. This means they should be able to bask in the light but also get away if desired, much as they might in the wild. Many twilight-active (crepuscular) and night-active (nocturnal) species do get some exposure to the sun and may also benefit from low levels of UVB, which helps regulate their photoperiod and vitamin D levels as well.

Please see our additional “UVB Lighting for Companion Birds and Reptiles” for specific instructions for your particular pet and the UVB bulb that we recommend for him or her.

**HIDING PLACES:** Your frog will appreciate a good hide hut, just make sure it is big enough for him to enter and turn around in. You can also place a hide hut over the water dish as well; your frog will be spending a lot of time in the water.

**SUBSTRATE:** We recommend a loose coconut fiber substrate, available in the reptile department and made by several companies. It is made from the husks of coconuts. This substrate is ideal for your frog, as it will help hold humidity in and is also a perfect substrate for plants. Keep the substrate slightly damp, but not watery. Plant your live plants right into the substrate.

Live plants can help increase the humidity in your frog enclosure. Be sure to include only reptile safe plants such as pothos, aloe, philodendrons, spider plants, ficus, and dracenaes. They can be planted directly into the enclosure substrate.

**WATER BOWL:** Include a large but relatively shallow (1 to 1 ½ inches) water dish in the enclosure. It should be large enough for him to sit in comfortably, but not deep enough for him to drown in. Pac mans are not good swimmers.

**TEMPERATURES:** Cage temperatures should be monitored daily and kept at the temperatures listed at the top of this page. Use your reptile thermometer to check the temperatures in different places in the cage regularly to make sure they continually match the listed proper temperatures.

\* If the room temperature falls below 70 degrees at night, a supplemental infrared or ceramic heat fixture may be necessary. (These fixtures do not emit a light spectrum that is visible to the frog, so it will not disturb him at night, but they WILL provide the necessary supplemental heat.)

If your frog does not receive the proper heat at the proper temperatures along with UVB light, he may become sick with issues such as respiratory disease and will probably stop eating, as frogs have a hard time digesting their food without proper heat and light.

**DAY/NIGHT LIGHT CYCLES AND HEATING:** All amphibians must have distinct day and night periods in their enclosure to maintain their biological rhythms. Pac man frogs need 8-12 hours of daytime and 8-12 hours of nighttime. However, as the daylight hours change seasonally outside, daylight hours inside the tank should reflect the same.

**The day period must be light, and the night period must be dark.**

A timer should be used to set day/night periods.

**HABITAT MAINTENANCE:** Daily maintenance should consist of spot cleaning by removing soiled substrate, cleaning water bowl thoroughly and wiping glass clean.

The entire tank should be cleaned thoroughly at least once every month with:

- A mild dishwashing liquid in warm water (make a weak dilution),  
THEN
- Vinegar & water (1:8)  
OR bleach and warm water (1:32)
- Cage “furniture” should also be scrubbed clean with the same dilution.
- RINSE OFF ALL SOAP AND BLEACH THOROUGHLY WITH PLAIN WATER BEFORE RE-INTRODUCING YOUR PET TO ITS ENCLOSURE!!
- NEVER MIX VINEGAR AND BLEACH – IT CREATES A TOXIC SOLUTION

- **NOTE:** water used for cleaning does not need to be de-chlorinated, as your pet will not be drinking it or bathing in it.

**GROOMING & HYGIENE:** To reduce the risk of contracting and spreading salmonella poisoning (and the toxins from your toad), all handlers should wash their hands after handling any amphibian.

**SIGNS OF A HEALTHY ANIMAL:** smooth, even skin; no traces of mites (small, reddish brown spots around nostrils, near ears and eyes); clear, bright eyes; rounded, full body; strong, even, smooth jaw line. It is very important to keep a journal for each animal that records feeding, refusal, shedding, unusual behavior, changes in behavior and dates of bulb changes. This will help your veterinarian trouble-shoot any health issues.

We recommend physical exams every year or two years with an exotic pet veterinarian for pet reptiles and amphibians. If your vet sees your pet regularly, many common conditions that afflict pet reptiles and amphibians can be caught and treated early. If not caught early enough or if left untreated, many of these conditions can become far worse if not fatal.

**SIGNS OF ILLNESS:** Irregular skin; small reddish brown spots (mites) around mouth, eye area, ear area; irregular jaw line, ‘dents’ in mouth with or without cottage cheese-like material (mouth rot); cloudy eyes or dull colored body when not in a shed; bloating or thinned body; irregular feeding and defecating habits. Limp, thin body, lethargy, sunken eyes, pinkish patches or spots on belly or sides; obvious wounds from cage mates or prey.

**SOME COMMON PROBLEMS INCLUDE:**

<b>HEALTH ISSUE:</b>	<b>SYMPTOMS:</b>	<b>TREATMENT:</b>
<b>Mites, parasites</b>	Small reddish-brown spots around eyes, mouth & on body or in substrate. However, pet may show no signs of harboring parasites besides declining health.	See exotic pet veterinarian (fecal parasite evaluation and appropriate medication)
<b>Skin problems – bacterial, fungal, abrasions</b>	Ulcers, patches or wounds visible on skin, lethargy or loss of appetite	See exotic pet veterinarian. Optimize cage set-up, topical and systemic medications
<b>Bloating disease</b>	Bacterial disease - Accumulation of fluid under the skin gives a bloated look to the frog.	See an exotic pet veterinarian immediately for antibiotic therapy.