

# CREATURE CARE SHEET

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## **False Tomato Frog** *Dyscophus guineti*

### **Origins**

Tomato frogs belong to the family group Microhylidae and genus *Dyscophus*, of which there are 3 recognised species, *Dyscophus antongilli*, *D. guineti* and *D. insularis*. All three species are endemic to Madagascar and are only found on the northern part of the island. They can be found at elevations of up to 200 metres right down to sea level and tend to favour areas of humid forest.

*D. guineti* is supposedly the most readily available of tomato frogs and is also known by several common names such as the false tomato frog, Guinets frog and the Sambava frog. These can be found in the north east of Madagascar and are generally yellowish-orange with brown lines.

### **Description**

These chubby little reddish coloured frogs earned their name due to their appearance, being similar to tomatoes – especially when they inflate. But their true colours can vary a great deal, presenting with many shades of orange, red and brown, even some yellow. Tomato frogs are sexually dimorphic, with the females generally displaying much brighter colours than the males, with the males tending to be duller browns usually. Juveniles are also duller and brighten with age. Their bellies are white to yellow and they often have black spots on their throats. Fully grown adult Tomato frogs can measure anywhere between 4 and 10cm inches in length, with females being larger than males in most cases. If your tomato frog starts to change colour to a dull brown then it can be a sign that it is unhappy and possibly stressed.

### **Housing**

A terrestrial vivarium will be suitable for these primarily terrestrial frogs 1m long by 18" deep and 45 cm high should be sufficient space for a small group (3-4) of these frogs. Choose an enclosure material which will withstand high humidity levels and regular cleaning. Also consider ventilation carefully, a good airflow is required to help prevent a build up of stagnant air, but you may need to avoid screen tops as they can prevent the humidity reaching the required levels. A purpose designed vivarium is the best bet.

Vivarium furnishings.

Use sturdy plants within the enclosure to provide climbing and hiding places, either plastic or live plants can be suitable. Cork bark, bendable vines and commercially produced hides can all be used for extra perches and cover, but it may be prudent to choose materials which will withstand high humidity and regular cleaning.

### **Substrate**

These frogs love to burrow down deep into the soil in their natural habitat, hence it is widely recommended that they are provided with a substrate which is at least 6 cm deep to allow for their natural behaviour. Suggested substrates include potting soil which is free from chemicals (which can be harmful to your frog), coco fibre, or a moisture retaining bark. Additionally an area of damp moss is strongly recommended, this must be rinsed out daily in dechlorinated

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water. The substrate needs to be kept damp but not wet and will require a daily spot clean to remove any waste or dead food and fully change the substrate every 2-3 weeks.

## Temperature and heating

Juveniles require lower temperatures than adults and temperatures should not be raised above 80F until they have reached adult size. An ambient temperature of 24C is suggested with a warmer area to one side of the enclosure reaching up to 28C for young and up to 29C for adults. Night time temperatures can be allowed to drop to around 20-24C. A heatmat would be an appropriate way of obtaining the desired temperatures, but this can depend on the temperatures of your house and seasonal changes. Bulbs are not appropriate and can desiccate frogs rapidly. Which ever heating device is utilised, be sure to use it as per manufacturers guidelines, use it in conjunction with the appropriate thermostat and to protect your frogs from harming/burning themselves on the device, by using a guard or placing heatmats outside the enclosure.

## Humidity and water

Humidity should be kept between 70 and 80%, by misting the enclosure once or twice daily. Altering ventilation and using live plants plus using a moisture retaining substrate will aid maintenance of humidity levels. Chlorine and chloramines can be harmful to your frog, therefore it would be wise to either leave water standing for 24 hours to allow chlorine to dissipate or add a commercially available water treatment to remove the said ingredients. There are many products available for this use and some also include a product for your frogs skin which is supposed to encourage slime coat development providing a natural protective barrier for amphibians, but the use of these is highly debatable amongst frog enthusiasts, so further reading is suggested.

Use of distilled or reverse osmosis water is highly discouraged as both can result in detrimental health conditions for your frog. Your frog will require fresh treated water provided in a shallow water dish daily, the water level should be no deeper than the height of the frogs nose when it is at rest. Ensure your frog can easily climb into and out of its water.

It is extremely important to provide water in a dish and keep it clean as frogs absorb water through their belly skin and also take it into their bladders via their vent. If water appears dirty then change it more frequently than daily – they do like to defaecate in their water bowls!

## Lighting

Advice on lighting for Tomato frogs varies, some recommend UVB lighting whilst others do not. Most authorities state that they require a photo-period of 8 hours daily of UVB lighting and this aids absorption of minerals as well as enhancing the frogs colour.

## Feeding

Tomato frogs will feed on most insects, commonly available food sources include crickets, small locusts, waxworms, mealworms, silkworms, small cockroaches, fruit flies ( for youngsters) etc etc.. Whatever food you supply it will need to be gut-loaded in order to provide optimum nutrition for your frog. You need to feed your insects on either one of the commercial insect foods or vegetables high in calcium such as cabbage (not lettuce as this has little nutritional value). Variety is good for your frog and will help provide it with a healthy diet.

Beware of catching insects locally as insecticides/weedkillers and other crop sprays can be harmful to your pet. Juveniles require feeding daily and adults every 2-3 days. Dust food with a high quality multi vitamin and calcium supplement twice weekly – do not spray during feeding as you don't want to wash of the supplement. Feed appropriate sized insects, smaller for juveniles.

## Temperament

These are a fairly shy frog and may not be seen a lot during the daytime as they are mostly nocturnal. They can inflate like a balloon if they feel threatened, this is in order to make themselves look larger in the hope of scaring of predators.

Tomato frogs spend large amounts of time partially buried in substrate, waiting to ambush

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passing insects for food. Care should be taken that they do not mistake your hands as food as they may try to bite/eat your fingers.

## Handling

Tomato frogs are known to produce a sticky, white mucus like substance ( from their cheeks) (3), often when threatened, it is thought that the purpose of this substance is to deter predators as it is a mucous membrane irritant. Although not toxic, this goo can bring about an allergic reaction in humans, therefore we advise against handling. If handling is absolutely unavoidable, then gloves could be worn.

Apart from the above reason, handling frogs should be kept to a minimum anyway to avoid damaging their delicate skin and avoid stressing your frog.

## Suitability as a pet

Tomato frogs are fascinating little frogs to watch, with interesting little behavioural quirks. But they are not a pet to be handled. Whilst primarily nocturnal, they do come out through the day. They are famous in Madagascar for their night time serenades, so you might not want to keep them in your bedroom!

## Hygiene/cleaning

As with all frogs you will need to be fastidious with cleaning. It is extremely important to spot clean daily and fully clean the enclosure out regularly (every 2 – 3 weeks). Do not use household cleaning products as they can be harmful to your frog, there are many safe, specialised cleaning products available from reptile shops and via the internet. It is also recommended that you avoid the use of soaps, perfumes and aftershaves etc on your hands whilst handling the frogs equipment, substrate, food or water as they too can be harmful to your frog.

Also avoid any use of aerosols or air fresheners in the room that you keep your frog in. As with most animals frogs can carry zoonoses ( a disease which can pass from animals to humans) such as salmonella, this is easily avoided simply by washing your hands in hot soapy water following contact with your frog and its equipment.