



Portsmouth Reptile & Amphibian Society  
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P.R.A.S Care sheet No 15

Common Name: **Poison Arrow Frogs**

**Scientific name:**

*Dendrobates leucomelas*,  
*D. auratus*, *D. azureus*, *D tinctorius*

**Care Difficulty:** Moderate

Creating the right environment and vivarium set up is essential but once achieved *Dendrobates* are relatively easy to keep. Because of their bright and attractive colouration they are often copied for the toy market so to avoid any problems they are not recommended for households with small children.

**Distribution:**

*D. leucomelas* is from Venezuela and adjacent regions, living in damp lowland rainforests. *D.auratus* is from damp Central American rain forests. *D. azureus* from damp forests and savannahs in Surinam and *D. tinctorius* from the rain forests of Guyana and Northern Brazil.

**Description:**

Each of the above dendrobates has it own specific colouration. *D. leucomelas* is base black with three yellow to orange cross bands with black dots in them. Adult size for all above species 3.8-6.0cm (1.5-2.3").

**Housing:**

It is not advisable to house *D.leucomelas* with either *D. tinctorius* or *D. auratus* as they will readily interbreed.

A large well-planted moist terrarium about 70x60x70cm (28x24x28") is ideal for these social species. The terrarium can be glass or plastic. The substrate should be peat moss covered with green moss and should have an area with a small water container plus an area of larger leaved plants such as bromeliads and ferns.



Temperatures should be 23–28°C (73–82°F) during the day and 18–20 °C (64–68°F) during the night. Good thermostats are recommended to control heating systems, to keep the terrarium at the correct temperatures. Relative humidity should be varied between 70 to 100%. This can be achieved by either spraying with luke-warm water, a waterfall or misting system, or a mixture of all three. Tap water should be aerated or left to stand for a couple of days prior to use to dechlorinate it.

**Diet:**

They will take a variety of small insects, such as stage 1 & 2 crickets, fruit flies small worms, wax worms and spiders. Although in the wild many of these species will eat ants, European ants are not suitable. *D. tinctorius* can be sensitive to a poor narrow diet

**Breeding:**

For most species females are 2–5mm longer than males, they are also more rounded in body shape. Male *D. tinctorius* and *D. azureus* have thicker second and third toes compared to the female. For most of the above species the males will start to vocalise from 14–16 months, at first as a general croak and then over the next couple of months develop into a more species-specific courtship trill. A hierarchy develops over a period of time between the different males and females within the group. Often one female will be seen to jump on the back of another, and hold the smaller or more submissive animal into a position with its abdomen pressed to the ground. Competition between males seems to be limited to vocalisation. The males stand proud, body erect on extended forelimbs with massively inflated throat/vocal sacs and produce a continuous trill announcing his desire to mate. The call is (10–18 seconds in length, 30 pulses a second with a main frequency of 2–3 kHz) Most calling occurs at 25°C (77°F) or above.

In periods of high humidity the males will lure females to suitable spawning sites. In the terrarium the site could be a dish of water under a flowerpot, film canister, cork bark or coconut shell. A female ready to spawn will hop onto the back of one of the calling males and move her body to stroke the males back. The eggs may be left in situ so that natural brood behaviour may take place, however the eggs may succumb to mould or may be eaten by other frogs.

To remove the spawn, fill a shallow dish to a depth of 1mm with de-chlorinated water at 22–23°C (72–73°C) and place the eggs in dark side up. Keep in a dark place. When the larvae within the egg appear to be slimming raise the water level to 10–20 mm. Fertilised eggs will become clear and hatch after 7–14 days.

Dendrobates young are carnivorous and so if possible should be reared separately. The larvae will usually not eat anything for three to four days. After this period they will munch on crumbled fish flakes, chopped earthworms, daphnia and tubifex. Water should be refreshed at least every other day. Any fungal or bacterial problems can be held at bay using very small amounts of Malachite green.

Front legs will begin to appear from 8–20 weeks. Transfer the larvae to a terrarium

where there is plenty of opportunity to come ashore. The tiny Froglets can drown very easily. Give them lots of moist moss and plenty of hiding places. The once the Froglets tails have disappeared they will eat fruit flies, aphids and micro crickets.