

The Green Dart Frog of Taboga Island

The Green Dart Frog or *Dendrobates auratus* can be found in Central and northern-South America, as well as Hawaii where they were introduced. They are abundant on Taboga Island in Panama, where they are said to have morphed into a unique pattern.



The adults make their home on rainforest floor. They prefer locations near small streams or pools where their tadpoles will live. They are quite small, averaging about 1.57 inches (4 cm) long and have many color variants. Most of them are black and either green or light blue. An important characteristic of the Green Dart Frog is the poison glands on the surface of their body. Their bright colors are believed to encourage predators with color vision to avoid the frogs while the boldly contrasting patterns may be a defense mechanism against predators which lack color vision.

They can breed more than once a year during the rainy season from July to September, producing up to six offspring which will be independent at about eight weeks. Male frogs go through an elaborate ritual to attract mates. At the beginning of the mating season, the males fight among themselves to establish territories. The male then attracts a female with trilling sounds which is a high-pitched, buzz. Males can mate with many females and care for offspring of different females simultaneously. Females court the males and chase other females from their territories.

After being selected by the females, the males lead the females to the nest site made from leaf litter and the females lay four to six eggs there. When the eggs are developing, the male frog returns to the eggs to check on them. Once they have hatched, the tadpoles climb onto the male's back, and he carries them to a protected water source where the tadpoles are on their own. During the following six weeks they will mature. Green Dart Frogs can live to eight years in captivity.

Green Dart Frogs can be spotted during the day, constantly searching for food and taking care of young. They have excellent vision which they use to capture prey. The frogs feed mostly on spiders and small insects such as ants and termites which they find on the floor of the forest. They capture their prey by using their sticky tongues.

Green Dart Frogs have long been used by local peoples to provide poison for their weapons. Currently the possibility of various medicines being derived from the frogs is being explored.

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