

# Pixie Frog

## Care Guide for New Owners

Pixie Frog

Amphibian

Large Species

Terrestrial

### Quick Facts at a Glance

<b>Species</b>	Pyxicephalus adspersus (African bullfrog)
<b>Lifespan</b>	20 to 45 years; one of the longest-lived amphibians in captivity
<b>Adult Size</b>	Males: 4 to 9 inches, up to 2 lbs; Females: 2 to 4 inches (significantly smaller)
<b>Activity Cycle</b>	Primarily nocturnal; sedentary ambush predator
<b>Temperament</b>	Aggressive and territorial; males especially will bite without hesitation
<b>Enclosure</b>	40-gallon minimum for adult males; 20-gallon adequate for females
<b>Temperature</b>	75 to 85 degrees F; no dramatic gradient required
<b>Humidity</b>	60 to 80 percent; moist substrate required
<b>Diet</b>	Carnivore; insects, worms, and larger prey for adult males
<b>Handling</b>	Minimal; strong bite; absorbs substances through skin
<b>UVB</b>	Low-level UVB beneficial
<b>Legal Status</b>	Legal in Wisconsin; verify local ordinances

### Meet the Pixie Frog

The Pixie Frog, or African bullfrog, is the largest frog species kept commonly in captivity and one of the largest frogs in the world. Adult males are impressive animals: broad, muscular, and possessed of a powerful bite that they deploy without much warning. They are not delicate, shy animals. They are bold, assertive, and in their own way, remarkably personable once you understand how they communicate.

Pixie Frogs are long-lived to a degree that surprises most new owners. Males in captivity have been documented living 20 to 45 years with proper care. A Pixie Frog is not a casual commitment. It may very well be a lifelong one.

### **Males and Females Are Very Different Animals**

Male and female Pixie Frogs are so different in size that new owners sometimes believe they have two different species. Adult males can reach 9 inches and weigh close to 2 pounds. Females typically top out at 3 to 4 inches. Males require significantly larger enclosures and eat considerably larger prey. Know the sex of your frog and set up accordingly.

### **Wild Collection Concerns**

African bullfrogs are still collected from the wild in parts of their range for the pet trade. Captive-bred Pixie Frogs are available and should always be sought out. Wild-caught animals are more stressed, carry heavier parasite loads, and are significantly more difficult to establish in captivity than animals bred in human care.

## **Where They Come From**

African bullfrogs (*Pyxicephalus adspersus*) are native to sub-Saharan Africa, ranging across a broad swath of the continent from Nigeria and Sudan south through South Africa. They inhabit open grasslands, savannas, and semi-arid areas, living in burrows or buried in soil during dry periods and emerging when the rains come to feed and breed explosively in temporary pools.

Their ability to estivate, entering a deep dormancy sealed inside a cocoon of shed skin during dry seasons, allows them to survive harsh conditions for months. In captivity, estivation should not occur because it indicates a problem with humidity or temperature management. A wild animal's survival strategy is not something to replicate in a healthy captive environment.

Male African bullfrogs are among the few frog species that display paternal behavior in the wild. Males guard egg clutches and tadpole pools, and will aggressively attack anything that approaches, including predators much larger than themselves. This boldness and aggression is exactly why captive males bite without hesitation.

## Legal Considerations

Pixie Frogs are legal to own in Wisconsin. They are not listed as a restricted or prohibited species at the state level. Verify local city and county ordinances before adopting.

## Enclosures and Housing

Adult male Pixie Frogs need a minimum of a 40-gallon terrarium. Larger is better. Adult females can be housed in a 20-gallon enclosure. Glass terrariums work well. Provide at least 4 to 6 inches of substrate for burrowing. Pixie Frogs spend most of their time partially buried and need enough depth to fully submerge themselves in substrate.

Because Pixie Frogs absorb water through their skin, substrate moisture management is critical. The substrate should be moist but not waterlogged, holding together when squeezed without dripping freely. Check moisture daily and adjust by misting or adding water directly to the substrate as needed.

## Substrate

### Safe Substrate

- Coconut fiber: Excellent moisture retention, safe to partially ingest
- Organic topsoil without fertilizer or perlite
- A blend of coco fiber and organic topsoil
- Sphagnum moss as a surface layer

### Avoid These

- Gravel, rocks, or sand alone: Impaction risk, poor moisture
- Cedar or pine: Toxic to amphibians
- Calcium sand: Causes impaction
- Substrate treated with fertilizers or pesticides

## Temperature and Lighting

Maintain temperatures between 75 and 85 degrees F. A low-wattage heat bulb or under-tank heater on a thermostat provides consistent warmth. Avoid temperatures above 88 degrees F, which cause heat stress. Nighttime temperatures can drop to 68 to 72 degrees F without concern for healthy adults.

Low-level UVB lighting on a 12-hour cycle is increasingly recommended for amphibians and provides benefit for long-term health. A 2.0 or 5.0 UVB bulb is appropriate. It is not strictly required but is considered best practice for an animal with a potential 40-year lifespan.

## Diet and Feeding

Pixie Frogs are indiscriminate carnivores who will attempt to eat anything that fits in their mouth, and their mouth is very large. Adult males can eat substantial prey items including large roaches, large

crickets, earthworms, nightcrawlers, and occasional pinky or fuzzy mice. Females eat the same items in appropriately smaller sizes.

Feed juveniles every 2 to 3 days. Sub-adults every 3 to 4 days. Adults every 5 to 7 days. Pixie Frogs are extremely prone to obesity when overfed, which causes organ damage and dramatically shortens their lifespan. A healthy adult male should have a rounded but not spherical shape. If the frog cannot fully close its mouth or has visible fat rolls, reduce feeding immediately.

#### Safe Prey

- Dubia roaches (excellent nutritious staple)
- Crickets
- Earthworms and nightcrawlers (excellent, very nutritious)
- Hornworms (high moisture content)
- Silkworms
- Pinky or fuzzy mice for large adult males (use sparingly)

#### Avoid These

- Feeder fish regularly (thiaminase interferes with B1 absorption)
- Wild-caught prey (pesticide and parasite risk)
- Fireflies (toxic to frogs)
- Prey that is too large for the frog to swallow safely
- Anything from water not treated for chlorine

#### Use Feeding Tongs

Always use long feeding tongs when feeding a Pixie Frog. They strike fast and hard and do not distinguish fingers from food. A bite from a large adult male is a genuinely painful experience and can break skin. Never feed by hand.

#### Supplementation

Dust feeder insects with calcium without D3 at every feeding. Use a multivitamin once weekly. If using UVB lighting, calcium with D3 can be used once weekly in place of plain calcium. Gut-load insects with nutritious greens and vegetables for 24 to 48 hours before feeding.

## Water and Humidity

Pixie Frogs absorb water through their skin. Always use dechlorinated water for the water dish, for misting, and for any direct substrate watering. Chlorine and chloramine in tap water absorb directly through amphibian skin and cause harm. A shallow water dish no deeper than the frog's chin should be available at all times.

Maintain humidity between 60 and 80 percent. The substrate should remain consistently moist. Mist when humidity drops and add water directly to the substrate as needed to maintain moisture depth throughout.

## Common Health Issues

### Obesity

The most common health problem in captive Pixie Frogs. Overfeeding causes fatty organ infiltration, heart disease, and a dramatically shortened lifespan for an animal that could otherwise live decades. A Pixie Frog that cannot fully close its mouth is obese. Reduce feeding frequency and prey size immediately.

### Toxic Out Syndrome

Caused by the frog absorbing harmful substances through its skin, typically chlorine in tap water, soap or lotion residue on hands, or cleaning products near the enclosure. Signs include sudden loss of coordination, extended or rigid limbs, and collapse. Move to clean dechlorinated water immediately and seek veterinary care. This is a life-threatening emergency.

### Bacterial Skin Infections (Red Leg)

Caused by poor substrate hygiene, too-wet conditions, or unclean water. Signs include reddened skin, ulcers, lethargy, and loss of appetite. Requires veterinary treatment and full enclosure cleaning.

### Impaction

Caused by ingestion of substrate while hunting prey. Signs include a swollen abdomen and failure to defecate. Warm shallow water soaking may stimulate defecation. If unresolved in 24 hours, see a vet.

### Estivation

A dormancy response to dry conditions where the frog seals itself in a mucus cocoon. In captivity, this indicates a husbandry failure, specifically inadequate humidity or temperatures. Correct both immediately if estivation occurs.

### Parasites

Internal parasites are common, particularly in wild-caught animals. A fecal exam upon acquisition and annually thereafter is recommended.

### Nutritional Deficiencies

Caused by a monotonous diet without supplementation. Offer variety in feeder types and maintain a consistent supplementation schedule.

## Things Every New Pixie Frog Owner Should Know

### **This frog may outlive your other pets.**

A healthy male Pixie Frog can live 20 to 45 years. This is a commitment that could span decades. Think carefully about what that means before adopting.

### **Never use untreated tap water.**

Chlorine and chloramine absorb through the skin and cause harm. Always use dechlorinated or filtered water for everything that touches or surrounds your frog.

### **Use tongs for every feeding.**

Adult males bite hard and fast. Do not put your fingers near a hungry Pixie Frog. Always use long feeding tongs.

### **Obesity kills slowly but surely.**

It is very tempting to feed a Pixie Frog more than it needs because they seem endlessly hungry and enthusiastic about food. Overfeeding causes organ damage and shortens a lifespan that could be very long. Feed on a strict schedule.

### **Estivation in captivity means something is wrong.**

Wild bullfrogs estivate to survive dry seasons. Your captive frog has no reason to estivate if humidity and temperature are correct. If it happens, identify and correct the husbandry problem immediately.

### **Find an amphibian-experienced exotic vet before you need one.**

Frog medicine is specialized. Not all exotic vets have meaningful amphibian experience. Identify one in your area before there is an emergency.

### **Questions? We're Here!**

Boggy's Buddies is always happy to answer questions and support you throughout your Pixie Frog ownership journey. Reach us at [boggysbuddies@gmail.com](mailto:boggysbuddies@gmail.com) or find us on Facebook and Instagram.