

Panamanian amphibians attacked by fungus

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Something wicked this way comes -- at least if you're a frog or salamander living near El Cope, Panama.

An outbreak of an infectious disease called chytridiomycosis, attributed to the fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, has infected and caused rapid die-offs in eight families of Panamanian amphibians, scientists report in this week's issue of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

A survey of amphibian populations in central Panama has uncovered a case of chytridiomycosis that is rapidly radiating outward from western Panama into the El Cope region, spreading from northwest to southeast from Costa Rica toward Colombia.

"Chytridiomycosis is an alarming model system for disease-driven extinction of a high proportion of an entire class of vertebrates," the scientists said. "It is no longer correct to speak of global amphibian declines, but more appropriately of global amphibian extinctions."

The fungus has been implicated in the decline of more than 40 amphibian species in Central America and 93 such species worldwide, said zoologist Karen Lips of Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, lead author of the report.

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