

Detroit Zoo's own Dr. Ruth encourages amorous amphibians

March 17 2017, by Mike Householder



In this Tuesday, March 14, 2017, photo Dr. Ruth Marcec holds an Imitator Dart frog at the Detroit Zoo in Royal Oak, Mich. Marcec, the new director of the zoo's National Amphibian Conservation Center, is tasked with inducing frogs and salamanders to make a love connection. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio)

Dr. Ruth is bringing her sex-pertise to the Detroit Zoo.

Not to be confused with famed human sex therapist Dr. Ruth

Westheimer, Dr. Ruth Marcec is the new director of the zoo's National Amphibian Conservation Center. She is tasked with inducing frogs and salamanders to make a love connection—something the little critters aren't doing enough of these days.

Experts estimate that around half of the world's 7,600 known species of amphibians is threatened.

"It's very much a crisis," said Marcec. "If you combine all the endangered mammals and birds, that still doesn't add up to the percentage of amphibians that are threatened and endangered."

Among her responsibilities, which include overseeing amphibian care and welfare as well as conservation and research programs, Marcec is tasked with encouraging the cold-blooded vertebrates in her care to get down.

"Amphibians are very difficult to breed in captivity. You need to get the mood just right. They need some Marvin Gaye," she said, laughing. "No. They need specific barometric pressure. They need specific rainfall. Things like that." In lieu of Motown classics, Marcec will rest a tablet computer playing tree-frog mating calls on top of the animals' storage tank.



In this Tuesday, March 14, 2017, photo Dr. Ruth Marcec looks over an amphibian holding tank at the Detroit Zoo in Royal Oak, Mich. Marcec, the new director of the zoo's National Amphibian Conservation Center, is tasked with inducing frogs and salamanders to make a love connection. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio)

A veterinarian and reproductive physiologist, Marcec has developed a grading scale for amphibian ultrasound procedures used at zoos and aquariums across the globe, and she travels to other institutions to assist with their amphibian breeding efforts. The 30-year-old is a frequent visitor to Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Nebraska, where she breeds blue-spotted salamanders and Mississippi gopher frogs.

Marcec shares her breeding successes with the rest of the world. Puerto Rican crested toad tadpoles bred at the Detroit Zoo are shipped to their natural habitat in the U.S. territory, while critically endangered

Wyoming toads make their way to that state.

All of these efforts to keep amphibian species going are being undertaken for good reason, Marcec said. "If we didn't have amphibians, a lot of our ecosystems just wouldn't exist."

For instance, she said, amphibian larva serve to keep water clean, and salamanders are able to aerate soil.

"If you removed the salamanders from the Appalachian Mountains, the forests would die," she said.

In addition to their environmental importance, Marcec, who sports a tattoo on her wrist featuring her favorite [amphibian](#)—the Mexican axolotl—has a more selfish reason to keep amphibians around.



In this Tuesday, March 14, 2017, photo, Dr. Ruth Marcec holds an anole

newt, left, and a luristan newt at the Detroit Zoo in Royal Oak, Mich. Marcec, the new director of the zoo's National Amphibian Conservation Center, is tasked with inducing frogs and salamanders to make a love connection. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio)

"A lot of people don't recognize how adorable they are," she said with a smile.

More information: National Amphibian Conservation Center:
[detroitzoo.org/animal-habitat/ ... conservation-center/](https://detroitzoo.org/animal-habitat/...conservation-center/)

© 2017 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Detroit Zoo's own Dr. Ruth encourages amorous amphibians (2017, March 17)
retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-03-detroit-zoo-dr-ruth-amorous.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.