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Cannibalistic African clawed frog eats tadpoles of its relatives



Tadpoles beware

Minden Pictures/Alamy

By Joshua Rapp Learn

AFRICAN clawed frogs are cannibals. They will willingly eat their own tadpoles – but they like eating those of an endangered South African frog even more.

Biologists are already familiar with the fact that African clawed frogs (pictured above) will eat their own young. But John Measey at Stellenbosch University in South Africa and his colleagues wanted to know whether other tadpoles were on the frog's menu. They were particularly concerned about the fate of tadpoles belonging to the Cape platanna, an endangered species that lives in ponds around Cape Town.



of Ecology, doi.org/cx3t).

Measey says the evidence suggests the African clawed frog can tell the difference between the two types of tadpole. “That is very bad news for the Cape [platanna],” he says.

Partly due to their popularity as pets, African clawed frogs are now an invasive species on four continents. They don’t occur naturally around Cape Town either, having exploited urbanisation to colonise the area.

“It’s another interesting example where human alteration of the landscape has changed the playing field,” says James Vonesh at Virginia Commonwealth University, a co-author of the study.

Measey thinks it may be necessary to physically remove clawed frogs from the environment to help the Cape platanna.

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