



**NOW OPEN**  
**WEST COUNTY CENTER**  
 (314) 835-1300

**MCCORMICK & SCHMICK'S**  
 SEAFOOD RESTAURANT  
[CLICK HERE TO MAKE AN ONLINE RESERVATION](#)

Home | [Find it in today's St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#) | Suburban Journals | St. Louis' Best Bridal | Ladue News | MySTLtoday.com | Thrive

Web Search powered by **YAHOO!** SEARCH

site

Home News Opinion Business Sports Entertainment Life & Style Photos Jobs Autos  
 Weather Obituaries Traffic Lottery Today's Post-Dispatch Archive STL Info Site Map Subscribe RSS

[Home](#) ► [Life & Style](#) ► [Pets](#)

[Email this](#)   [Share this](#)   [Print this](#)   [Comments \(Be the first to comment\)](#)

## Poison dart frogs: a labor-intensive passion



A poison dart frog from Sean Stewart's collection. (Rob Carr/P-D)

**By Linda Lombardi**  
**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
 03/08/2009

yester

1. Could S
2. federal abc
3. St. Loui
4. House c
5. 197 wor
6. reading it)
7. Mark Kl
8. stations
9. St. Louis
10. The nev
11. Stepher
12. poll
13. Car dea
14. St. Lo
15. Carpenter.

**ST.LOU**  
**YAH**

Driving along a suburban road in Ellicott City, Md., you'd never guess you'd just passed an oasis of South and Central American wildlife.

With 500 adult frogs of 20 species -- not counting offspring -- Sean Stewart's collection of poison dart frogs is one of the largest anywhere.

They range from creatures no larger than your thumbnail to the 2-inch *Phylllobates terribilis*, the largest and, in the wild, one of the most poisonous. The tiny, brightly colored frogs are kept in pairs and small groups in about 150 tanks full of live plants and moss.

A visitor may be surprised to see one of Stewart's staff members casually pick up a frog that's made a run for it and pop it back into its tank. In fact, there's no danger -- the frogs are not poisonous in captivity.

Stewart owns and breeds more dart frogs than any zoo or aquarium, which rarely have the resources for the labor-intensive care of so many amphibians. Dart frogs appeal to hobbyists who can meet their specialized needs, including high humidity, controlled temperature and live food.

Save on International Calling  
(ROLL OVER A COUNTRY FOR COST)  
Vonage  
START SAVING NOW >>

### READ THE PET SERIES

- **Fostering gives homeless animals a second chance**
- **Fido may be cute, but can you capture it on film?**
- **What mix is your mutt? DNA can yield surprises**
- **Authors urge organic, other healthy food for dogs**
- **Not the right time for a pet? Try these options**
- **Poison dart frogs: a labor-intensive passion**

**SR. ENTERPRISE A**  
Saint Louis, MO  
The Lutheran Church

**TERRITORY MANA**  
Saint Louis, MO  
confidential

**SAFETY DIRECTOR**  
East Saint Louis, IL  
Company Confidential

**CRANE OPERATOR**  
Saint Louis, MO  
Mid American Steel &

**MYSTERY SHOPPER**  
Saint Louis, MO  
Resonse Mind

**ASSISTANT REGIONAL**  
Saint Louis, MO  
WFF Services

**OPERATIONS SUPERVISOR**  
Pacific, MO  
Graphic Packaging Int'l

**NURSE**  
Saint Louis, MO  
Saint Francis Medical Center

**RN / LPN / CNA / CNA**  
Saint Charles, MO  
Charlevoix Healthcare

**MIDDLE SCHOOL F**  
Saint Louis, MO  
University City School

new st  
neu  
The smart way  
GET SKILLS. GET  
Dead end  
need to r  
Select a p  
Enter ZIP

shop t

Stewart might have 1,000 baby frogs at once and, in season, up to 800 tadpoles in small cups, each of which need to be cleaned and fed individually.

He has supplied frogs to many institutions, including Chicago's Shedd Aquarium and the Philadelphia Zoo. But beyond that, the specialized knowledge of private breeders like him makes them a valuable resource.

"We get calls all the time from zoos about how to care for and how to treat illnesses in these animals," says Stewart. "We've had zoos send people to us to train."

His private customers range from serious collectors to the occasional 10-year-old whose parents are willing to put up with live crickets in the house.

Stewart also is involved with conservation programs in Peru, Costa Rica and Ecuador, and with research projects, including one with a university in Ecuador -- on top of his full-time job as an emergency room physician.

But what's perhaps most interesting about Stewart is that he may be special, but he's not unique.

"In the dart frog hobby, there tends to be a high percentage of people who are authentically interested in the natural history," says Ron Skylstad, executive director of Tree Walkers International, a group dedicated to involving hobbyists and individuals in amphibian conservation.

Frog species are currently disappearing at an alarming rate -- it's estimated that one-third to one-half of species are at risk of extinction. As a response to this crisis, TWI runs an Amphibian Stewardship Network, which keeps track of private collections by adding their animals to the International Species Information System (ISIS) database. So far, they've enlisted 71 collectors with 1,550 frogs of about 45 species.

The idea is to manage the captive population that's in private hands to ensure that it's sustainable, minimizing the number of animals that need to be brought in from the wild. The bigger goal is to bring together the public and private sectors for conservation.

"In a time of dwindling resources and accelerated extinction of frogs in the wild," says Skylstad, "it doesn't make sense to ignore people who are investing their own time and money."

Stewart's experience with dart frogs goes back 19 years to when he started as an intern at the National Aquarium in Baltimore. For him, collecting is not about the money.

Although prices of rarer frogs can be up to \$200 dollars apiece (the average is \$75), most of



Missouri Conferer



Curves



Teutenbe

what he makes goes for expenses -- such as \$600 a month on crickets.

In the wild, the dart frogs "make their poison from a plant alkaloid. No one knows exactly what it is -- it's probably a family of plants, since they're so widely distributed," says Stewart. "They probably eat a species of ant, that eats the plant."

Without that insect in their diet, the captive frogs are safe to touch. While it's best to avoid excessive handling, that's for the frogs' sake: Their skin is delicate and easily damaged.

Their reputation as poisonous is in any case somewhat exaggerated: Even in the wild, only three species are toxic enough to hurt a human, and the poison would need to get into your bloodstream -- unlikely with casual contact.

-----

On the Net:

<http://herpetologic.net/>

<http://www.treewalkers.org/>

[Write a letter to the editors](#) | [Subscribe to a newsletter](#) | [Subscribe to the newspaper](#)  
[Read the latest life & style stories](#) | [View all P-D stories from the last 7 days](#)

## reader comments

**COMMENTING RULES:** We encourage an open exchange of ideas in the STLtoday community, but we ask you to follow **our guidelines**. Basically, be civil, smart, on-topic and free from profanity. Don't say anything you wouldn't want your mother to read! And remember: We may miss some, so we need your help to police these comments. Please identify the comment, the story and why you think it's objectionable.

[▶ Read the commenting guidelines](#)

(0) Comments

Please [Login](#) or [Register](#) to comment.

[Pool Frog](http://www.suntropic.com)  
www.suntropic.com

[Pool Frog](http://www.dixielandpools.com)  
www.dixielandpools.com

**Quick Links:**

[Site Map](#)  
[Horoscopes](#)  
[Obituaries](#)  
[Lottery](#)  
[Newspapers in Education](#)

**Information:**

[About Us / Contact Us](#)  
[Archives](#)  
[Terms of Service](#)  
[Privacy Policy](#)  
[Copyright](#)

**Services:**

[Subscriber Services](#)  
[Advertise](#)  
[Help](#)  
[E-mail Newsletters](#)  
[P-D Store](#)

**STLtoday.com sites:**

[St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#)  
[Suburban Journals](#)  
[St. Louis' Best Bridal](#)  
[Ladue News](#)  
[MySTLtoday.com](#)

