

Hope for Amphibians

Worldwide, amphibian populations have been devastated by the chytrid fungus, since it first emerged in the 1980's. The fungus cripples the animal's immune system and causes thickening of the skin. The skin no longer absorbs water and dehydration and heart failure follow. Jason Rohr and colleagues at the University of South Florida have discovered that fungal cells, first killed by freezing, were effective in vaccinating Cuban tree frogs. Dead fungal cells were applied up to four times. Subsequently the animals which were then infected with live fungus were less affected. Fungal counts reduced from 40 000 to 8 000 cells/gram.

Rohr hopes to vaccinate wild frogs by spraying the dead fungal cells about the frog habitat, hoping that the frogs will pick up sufficient fungal cells to trigger their immune system. An alternative might be to immunise captured amphibians and then return them to the wild.

Information gathered from an article by Andy Coglan in 12 July 14 New Scientist