

Caracas, 9 August 2019

Carolina Schmidt Zaldívar  
Ministra del Medio Ambiente  
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Dear Minister,

I am contacting you on behalf of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) regarding the Loa frog (*Telmatobius dankoi*), a Critically Endangered micro-endemic species only known from a small sector called “Las Vertientes,” in Calama, Antofagasta Region, and considered to be the vertebrate with the highest extinction risk in Chile.

On a recent trip to the site, members of the SSC, as well as other amphibian specialists, found that the stream known to harbor the only extant population of the Loa frog was completely dry, largely due to draining around the slope where the stream originated. The area has been impacted by the uptake of water for mining activities, the “Las Vertientes” property development, and the diversion of irrigation canals for agricultural use. A total of 62 malnourished frogs were found in a small pool and translocated to a nearby (6 km) stream prior to the complete desiccation of the pool. Subsequently, a team of experts returned to rescue as many of the frogs as possible, and 14 individuals were found and translocated to the National Zoo of Chile, in an effort to stabilize them and establish an insurance colony. This has not been attempted before, but all stakeholders are joining efforts to work towards this goal.

Although the immediate priority has been the rescue of the remaining individuals of *T. dankoi*, it is urgent that water extraction from the stream is halted and habitat restoration activities be initiated so that the species has a home to return to. Developing a framework that may allow for this, including the establishment of a sanctuary or a reserve, would be of enormous significance for the survival of the species and ultimately of its habitat in Calama.

We are aware that many stakeholders have been proactively involved in *T. dankoi*'s rescue effort, including SSC members, the National Zoo of Chile, academic institutions and the Government of Chile, something that is very encouraging and commendable. We therefore respectfully request that these multi-institutional efforts continue with the same collaborative spirit, and request that consideration be given to the development of an emergency plan for the protection and recovery of *T. dankoi*'s habitat. For this reason, we call for the establishment of a technical working group, to assist the work in this matter.

The Chilean branch of the IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group, as well as our colleagues in the IUCN SSC Conservation Translocation Specialist Group, are available to provide technical expertise to help save the Loa frog and avoid the extinction of the most threatened vertebrate of the Chilean biota.

Sincerely,



Jon Paul Rodríguez, Ph.D.

Chair

IUCN Species Survival Commission

Copias enviadas a:

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