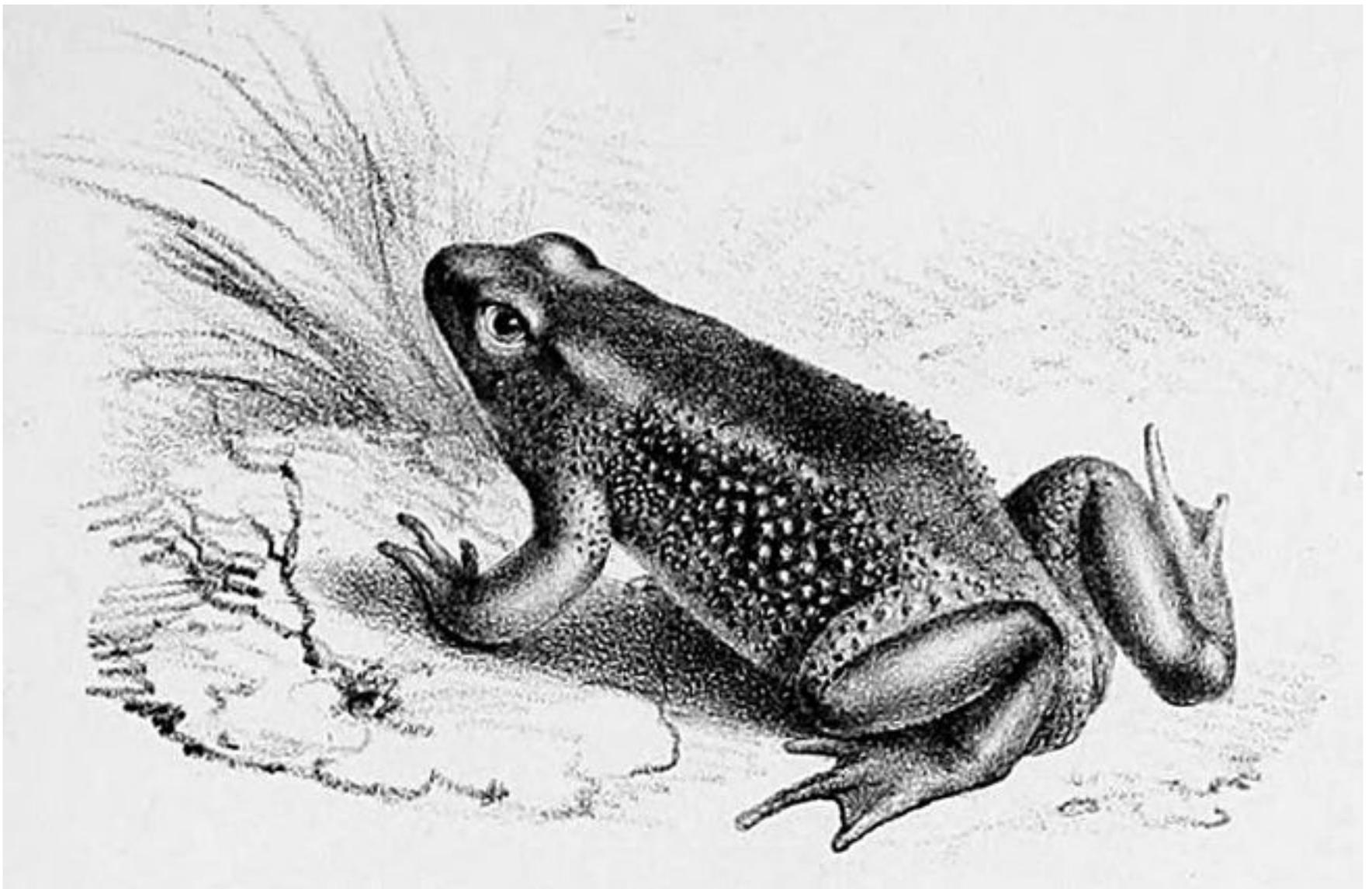


School-age boy saves a species after quest to find an 'extinct' frog

The frog had been feared extinct for at least the last 30 years.

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Though once common throughout Ecuador, *Atelopus ignescens* has been reduced to only a few surviving members. (Photo: Albert Charles Lewis Günther/Wiki Commons)

The Jambato harlequin frog (*Atelopus ignescens*) was once so common in Ecuador that many people remember playing with them around their houses as children. But it's been a different story for children born over the last few decades. The species experienced a sharp and sudden collapse some 30 years ago and seemed to disappear overnight, likely as a result of climate change and a horrific fungal disease.

"It was such a long-standing presence in the Ecuadorian community that we would have never conceived it could disappear," said Luis Coloma of the Jambatu Center for Research and Conservation of Amphibians, [to New Scientist](#).

Prompted in part by nostalgia, the center decided to offer a \$1,000 reward to anyone who could track down any long-lost surviving members of the species. It had been over 30 years since any reported sightings of the frog, so the chances of success were slim, but researchers hoped to at least drum up awareness for amphibian conservation.

And that they did. One young Ecuadorian boy and his family made the quest for the Jambato harlequin frog a passion project, a project that would not only end up paying for the boy's education, but would result in the resurrection of a species.

One day, while scouring through the brush, that boy stumbled upon a frog with a curious truncated snout, characteristic of *Atelopus ignescens*. Of course, being too young to have ever seen one of these frogs alive before, it took some investigation to confirm its identity. Sure enough, this was it: the first verified face-to-snout encounter between a boy and a Jambato harlequin frog in a generation.

It wasn't just a single frog; a small colony had been discovered, giving hope that the species could be revived. Scientists took the helm, gathered up the small colony, and attempted to breed them under safe, controlled conditions.

"For several months, the frogs would mate but never lay eggs," Coloma recalls. "So we decided to move them to an outdoor enclosure," said Coloma. "When we finally discovered the eggs, we felt like Thomas Edison must have felt seeing an electric bulb lighting for the first time. It was extraordinary."

The tadpoles are reportedly doing well, and there is every reason to believe that most of them will mature into adulthood. The species' population is still dangerously small, but there is now reason for hope. An entire species has been given a second chance, thanks to the curious and observant eye of a young boy.