



# Desperately seeking: The world's loneliest frog could soon have a mate

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For Romeo the Sehuenacas water frog, love does not come easily. The orange-bellied amphibian – the last-known individual of his kind – has been plaintively croaking from his home in Bolivia's Cochabamba Natural History Museum for the last ten years in the hopes that a willing female might heed the call. But his croaks have so far gone unanswered. Romeo was captured in 2008 by researchers eager to start a breeding programme for the imperilled frogs; however, to date no biologists have been able to track down another Sehuenacas water frog in the wild.



Romeo may be the last individual of his kind. Image © D. Alarcón and D. Grunbaum

But that could all change soon. Following the success of a fund-raising campaign earlier this year that involved creating a Match.com profile for Romeo complete with interests (food) and partner preferences (stocky, two to three inches tall), a team from Global Wildlife Conservation and the Museo de Historia Natural Alcide d'Orbigny are set to launch field expeditions in Bolivia in the hopes of tracking down a mate for the lovelorn amphibian.

"We are looking forward to scouring the streams to find Romeo his Juliet," said the museum's chief of herpetology, Teresa Camacho Badani, who will lead the expeditions. Camacho Badani recalls spotting the endangered frogs in the field a decade ago and hopes that there are still some out there. "This is a unique opportunity to prevent the extinction of a species that has become a playful flagship for conservation," she adds.

From December to February, expedition teams, made up of at least two biologists and a veterinarian, will embark on two trips per month in search of Romeo's perfect match. The rainy season is kicking off in Bolivia and scientists are hoping this will increase the likelihood of finding frogs. Teams will sift through rivers where *Sehuenacas* water frogs have previously been recorded, including Romeo's original home



Searching for the *Sehuenacas* Water Frog. Image © Arturo Muñoz / Museo de Historia Natural Alcide d'Orbigny

In addition to hunting for *Sehuenacas* water frogs, expedition members also hope to rediscover two other water frog species that have not been seen for some time: *Telmatobius sibiricus* and *Telmatobius edaphonastes*.

Romeo's quirky Match.com profile has contributed the bulk of the funding for the trips. The profile links to a donation page which raked in contributions from more than 32 countries. Match.com matched all donations made between February 9 and Valentine's Day bringing the total to \$25,000.

"Thanks to all of the generous donors – and true romantics – who gave money this past Valentine's Day to support these expeditions, we have a real shot of saving this species," said Chris Jordan, GWC's Central America and Tropical Andes coordinator. "At GWC we're all about giving the under-frog a chance. Romeo hasn't given up hope, his fans haven't given up hope, and neither have we."