

Austrochaperina robusta

Dominique Wiseman, 2000 © 2001 James Cook University

Authority: Fry 1912

Common Name: Peeling Chirper, Robust Whistling Frog or Nursery Frog #2.

Description (Barker *et al.* 1995; Chambers 1998; Parker 1934; Queensland wet tropics management authority 1999): A small frog of cryptic colouration with a rounded, almost rotund, body and a distinctive black canthal stripe running from the nostril, through the eye, above the tympanum and to the shoulder. The snout is slightly prominent and rounded. Distinctive disks are found on the fingers and toes. The fingers are short with the first much shorter than the second. The skin is smooth or shagreened above and smooth below. The dorsal colour is dark brown to dull orange, with diffuse markings on the sides of the head, and a pale mid-vertebral stripe in many individuals. Lighter beneath, the ventral surface (belly, groin and hidden parts of the thigh) ranges from dull yellow to orange, mottled with darker markings and often scattered with white to yellowish spots. The male has a small oval inner, but not outer, metatarsal tubercle. Males are 20–27mm in length and females range in size from 28-33mm. Males have a vocal sac. The mating call is a series of short, high-pitched chirps, arranged in couplets. The male *Austrochaperina robusta* calls while concealed under rocks or leaf litter.

Similar Species (Barker 1995; Chambers 1998; Mahoney *et al.* 1992; Queensland Museum 2000): Formerly of the *Sphenophryne* genus. All members of the genus *Austrochaperina* look similar. The four species of found in Australia are karyotypically very similar to each other, providing support for the close relationship suggested by their morphology. This species looks identical to another frog occurring in the Atherton Tablelands, the Cricket Chirper, *Austrochaperina fryi*. The best way to tell them apart is by their call. *Austrochaperina robusta* co-exists with another alike looking species, *A. pluvialis*, from which the latter can be distinguished by the demarcation of the ventral colouration at the junction of chest and abdomen.

Range (Barker 1995; Chambers 1998; Queensland Museum 2000): Found only over a small area between Tinaroo Dam on the Atherton Tablelands and Paluma, Queensland, at altitudes above 360m. Specifically, Bluewater Range (South of Paluma) to the Lamb Range (North of Lake Tinaroo).

Ecology and Behaviour (Barker 1995; Chambers 1998; Queensland Wet Tropics Management Authority 1999): *A. robusta* inhabits the rainforests of northern Australia. The species was first described in 1912 by D. B Fry, and after a series of changes, gained its current name in 1965, following a review of Microhylid frogs by Richard Zweifel. They are found primarily beneath logs and rocks in vine forest located between Atherton and Paluma. Little has been documented on the behaviour of this species, except that they are difficult to locate as they are said to possess 'ventriloquist' qualities.

Breeding Biology (Chambers 1998): Unlike most frog species, *A. robusta* doesn't breed in standing water. Commonly called Nursery Frog #2, they lay a small clutch of eggs in very moist soil under rocks, logs and leaf litter. The males guards the

eggs while they develop, coating the eggs in a special antifungal agent to help the eggs survive in a wet environment. Embryos develop directly within the egg capsule to emerge as miniature adult frogs.

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