

PANAMA'S GOLDEN FROG

Eustorgio Mendez

The Republic of Panama is a country of about 20,000 square miles which links North and South America. Besides its famous Canal, exuberant tropical forests, magnificent rivers, lakes, coasts and many other natural resources, it also boasts an extraordinary variety of wildlife. The fauna of Panama is one of the richest and most fascinating on the American continent.

The golden frog is among the most spectacular and renowned of these animals. Known to the native people of Panama as 'Rana Dorada', it represents one of the several geographical races of the species *Atelopus varius*. This species is notably variable in coloration and is distributed from Costa Rica south into Panama.

A true jewel of nature, the golden frog immediately arouses the curiosity and admiration of those lucky enough to see it. Its striking orange-yellow coloration may be either plain, or ornamented with black spots and designs of various shapes and sizes. The latter appear to be more typical of the younger animals. Not surprisingly, this amphibian has always been associated with the beautiful stylized golden figures of frogs produced by the pre-Columbian Indian cultures of Central America and northern South America. However, there is no evidence indicating that this frog was ever used as a model by those skilled artisans of the past. In fact, no ornaments of this nature have yet been discovered in excavations made within the range of this animal, or even from neighboring areas.

Traditions among the Guaymí Indians, who live in the chain of mountains of eastern Costa Rica and extreme western Panama, keep alive a number of ancient and exciting legends about a golden frog's magic power and splendid beauty. This wonderful amphibian, according to the legends, is extremely shy and lives in the most peaceful and secret parts of the mountains. The major virtue of this enchanted frog is its power to give happiness to any person who has the luck to find it. The effects of the animal's beauty are

The golden frog is confined to Panama, where it is now quite rare. Despite a fine of five dollars for capturing or killing a golden frog, many of them are sold to tourists as pets or souvenirs, or exported

