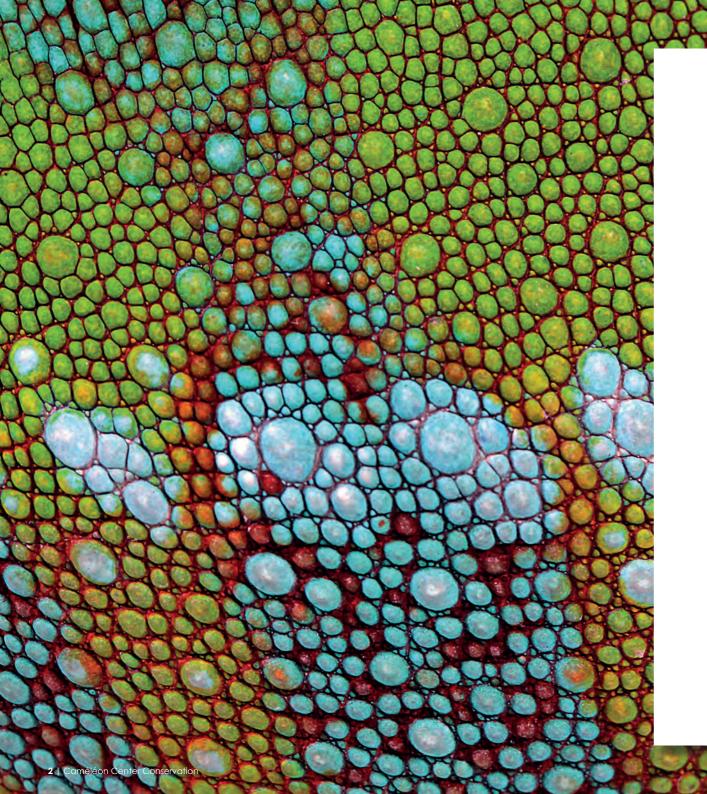
# Study and Conservation of **Chameleons**





# EDITORIAL

Understanding and saving chameleons, now that's a challenge! Yet, that is precisely our mission at the Caméléon Center Conservation. As the first NGO solely dedicated to chameleons, we strive to successfully execute projects, both in Europe and around the world, that contribute to their conservation or enhance scientific knowledge. On the occasion of our second anniversary, the CCC invites you to delve into its behind-the-scenes in this exclusive dossier. On the agenda: an immersive report from our headquarters in Switzerland, a portrait of our president-founder, and an interview with Olivier Marquis, the association's scientific advisor. Our ongoing projects will have no secrets left for you to uncover! Fragile yet fascinating, we believe that chameleons are far from having revealed all their secrets, but we cannot act alone. So... you can help us!

Harquis R/uillemin

## Sébastien

President and founder of the Caméléon Center Conservation, Sébastien METRAILLER has had a passion for herpetofauna and aquatic ecosystems from an early age. An author, educator, speaker, breeder, and project management expert, he is also a member of the Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group of the

IUCN, vice-president of the association PRT (Protection and Recovery of Turtles, Emys Center), and founder of the training firm ZooConseil. Advocating for a holistic and pragmatic approach to animal conservation, Sébastien now works on implementing practical projects dedicated to chameleon conservation through the association.



## Olivier

With a PhD in Biology, Olivier MARQUIS serves as the curator of reptiles and amphibians at the Parc Zoologique de Paris, an establishment belonging to the National Museum of Natural History. He is also a lecturer, field biologist, instructor in various animal care training programs, expert in numerous committees, member of the Crocodile Specialist Group of the IUCN, and co-manager for the Amphibian Specialist Group of the European Association of Zoos and Aquariums (EAZA). Olivier places great

importance on combining scientific methodology and zootechnical procedures to contribute to research and conservation efforts, embodying a scientific rigor at the core of projects for the Caméléon Center Conservation.



### Benoît

Benoît DE VILLELONGUE, a skilled herpetoculturist and consultant, is the founder of Herpéto-technique. Specializing in supporting zoological facilities, he is particularly involved in designing infrastructures tailored to the needs of captive reptiles and amphibians. With a passion for the animal world and as a reptile breeder himself, he gained experience as an animal caregiver in various zoological establishments, including ZooParc de Beauval, as well as in numerous private and public facilities.

Benoît contributes to enhancing the quality of zootechnical conditions implemented in the conservation breeding projects of the Caméléon Center Conservation association.

# Rayane

As a student and amateur photographer, Rayane VUILLEMIN has always had a passion for the diversity of the animal kingdom, and photography has been his means of encountering a wide variety of species. Intrigued by birds and animals from an early age, he has developed photographic skills focused on the notion of species and this has led him to visit over 100 zoological parks and to discover herpetology. Rayane contributes to the development, implementation, or monitoring of projects carried out by the Caméléon Center Conservation



association. He is notably responsible for the "Chameleon Diversity Image Bank" project, through which he shares his passion for wildlife while raising public awareness about the conservation challenges related to chameleons.

## Martin

A naturalist and terrarium enthusiast, Martin ETAVE has always been fascinated by the richness of life and has a particular interest in studying chameleons. As a member of the working group on chameleons at the DGHT, he has undergone training

in the study of these reptiles under the guidance of Anthony HERREL and Christopher V. ANDERSON, participating in research on the evolution, ecology, and physiology of these animals. With a Master's degree in Systematics, Evolution, and Paleontology from the National Museum of Natural History of Paris and Sorbonne Université, he is also pursuing a second Master's degree in journalism and scientific communication at the Université Paris Cité, enabling him to contribute to the communication efforts surrounding the projects of the Caméléon Center Conservation. PROJECTS



Ex situ project | ID 5.2

Imaae bank on

chameleon diversity

Harnessing the power of images for the conservation of cha-

essence of this project! With this goal in mind, the approach

involves consistently photographing as many chameleons as

possible (species, subspecies, locales, or forms) in a cohesive

and harmonious style. This photographic inventory serves as a

testament to the diversity of chameleons and can be particu-

an almost exhaustive representation of chameleon diversity.

the opportunity for high-quality image sales.

CHF 6.000

2023 - 2026

their ecologies, and environments; as well as exhibitions with

**Rayane Vuillemin** 

larly showcased in a book that blends art and science, offering

meleons, while also showcasing the photographs taken, is the

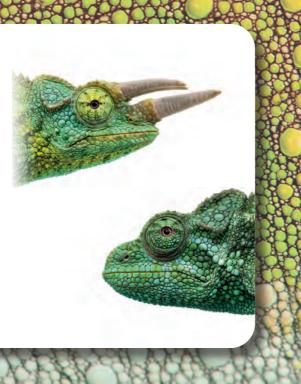
#### Ex situ projects | ID 5.1

### **Exhibition on chameleons** and conservation issues

Informing the public about the biology of chameleons and the challenges they face is the objective of this project! Through a collection of illustrated informational panels, this project aims at increasing public understanding and appreciation of these species. It also sheds light on the threats facing chameleons with the goal of raising awareness about the urgency of conservation, while emphasizing the crucial importance of preserving chameleon habitats to promote biodiversity and ensure ecosystem balance. The first exhibition was hosted by the Tropiquarium de Servion (in Switzerland) until February 29, 2024.







### Chameleons, threats, and conservation

Reptiles as famous as they are charismatic, yet over a third of chameleon species are threatened with extinction. The causes of this decline are manifold, although consistently attributable to human activities. However, it is through the collaborative efforts of scientists and NGOs that solutions can be developed to safeguard these incredible arboreal lizards.

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over a third of all species exclusively inhabit Madagascar.

Thus, the genera Brookesia, Calumma, Furcifer, and Palleon

are endemic to the red island, while *Bradypodion*, *Kinyongia*,

Nadzikambia, Rhampholeon, Rieppeleon, and Trioceros

are confined to various regions of the African continent.

Only the genus *Chamaleo* is found across Africa, Europe,

the Middle East, and Asia. Finally, Archaius tigris, the

sole representative of the genus Archaius, is

limited to the Seychelles archipelago.

A colorful family indeed!

hameleons are more threatened than other reptiles. According to the current assessment by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), 38% of chameleon species are believed to be threatened with extinction. whereas only 18% of reptiles in general are affected.

#### **A PRECARIOUS SITUATION**

Habitat loss is by far the greatest threat to these remarkable animals. Many

chameleons have notably restricted geographical distributions, sometimes limited to a single forest or mountain. Their strong dependence on specific types of habitat or vegetation also makes them particularly vulnerable to habitat destruction or fragmentation. Additionally, although cha-

meleons are rarely consumed, they are also victims of hunting. Local beliefs can lead

to the systematic destruction of encountered individuals. However, in most cases, legal or illegal collections serve to supply the

international trade. Finally, a number of species restricted to high-al-

titude misty forests are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Forced to shift their ranges ever higher in altitude, these chameleons may soon become extinct due to their inability to access new suitable habitats.

#### **HOPEFUL PROJECTS!**

Fortunately, solutions exist to address these threats! The first challenge is to better understand the biology, ecology, and distribution of these unique reptiles. All of this information is cru-

cial to identify the pressures facing That's the number of chameleon these animals and to implement relevant conservation actions. species described to date! Within reptiles, they Among these actions, the make up the family Chamaeleonidae, which is further most effective means to subdivided into 12 genera. Originating from the Old World.

ensure the survival of vulnerable species is still to preserve the environments conducive to their existence. However, in the case of species threatened by imminent habitat destruction, a feasible alternative could lie in the creation of breeding pro-

grams in specialized facilities, outside their natural habitat.

It is in this approach that the Caméléon Center Conservation currently proposes eight distinct projects that contribute to chameleon conservation or to the improvement of scientific knowledge. By acting together, we can continue to live in a world where chameleons exist!

PREAMBLE

#### In situ projects | ID 0.3

## Inventory and distribution of chameleons in Vohimana

This project aims at exploring the whole Vohimana private reserve in Madagascar and collect comprehensive data on chameleons. The compilation of data will result in an updated species list, a map of spatial distribution, and detailed environmental descriptions, thus providing an in-depth understanding of chameleon ecology within the reserve. It also involves local guides, generating direct income and strengthening their role in awareness. Discoveries will be utilized in a participatory science approach with actions involving the local population, students, and eco-volunteers. The compilation of data will serve as an essential foundation for conservation efforts.

CHF 22,000





In situ projects | ID 2.1

### Chameleon diversity and microhabitat preferences in the Vohimana reserve

Scheduled to run for one year, this project will mean training Master's students to collect data on the distribution, diversity, and ecology of chameleons in the Vohimana reserve in Madagascar. Molecular genetic and phylogenetic studies will also be conducted as part of this research. Dr. Mark D. SCHERZ (Natural History Museum of Denmark, KU) and Dr. Olivier MARQUIS (National Museum of Natural History, Paris) will co-supervise these research projects and final dissertations.



# If chameleon rhymes with conservation, it's thanks to him!

As the biologist in charge of reptiles and amphibians at the Paris Zoological Park, Olivier Marquis makes it his duty to combine research and conservation in his activities. He joins us to discuss the usefulness of captivity in this field and his role as the scientific supervisor of the Caméléon Center Conservation.

### You love reptiles, but how does reptile conservation fit in?

It's part of my job. I am responsible for reptiles and amphibians at the Paris Zoological Park, which is under the oversight of the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. Among other duties, as a biologist, I'm in charge of research and conservation programs specifically focused on these animals. Therefore, I can intervene at various levels: either by initiating projects with the zoo, or by providing technical or logistical support on other collaborative projects.

### You were the first to join the CCC team, what is your role there?

NTERVIE

As a scientific advisor, my role is to frame scientific questions effectively and find the best ways to address them. This involves suggesting protocols or facilitating connections with other research or conservation professionals. I hold a position at the interface between the captive and research worlds. So, what I provide is a bridge between these two environments, which are often like oil and water, they don't really mix... and I try to create the emulsion!

#### Do you think breeding programs can be viable solutions for the conservation of threatened reptiles species?

Conservation in the wild should always be prioritized. However, captivity can be a useful tool when a species' habitat is no longer viable. It's a choice: either we leave the animals in their degraded habitat and watch them disappear, or we decide to remove all or part of the population to safety in captivity, while we find a solution in the wild... provided one exists. It's not an end in itself but a very intrusive helping hand.



# Visit to the heart of the Caméléon Center Conservation

REPORTAGE

Recognized as a public utility association, the headquarters of the Caméléon Center Conservation is located just steps away from the Franco-Swiss border. Sébastien Métrailler, president and founder, opens its doors to reveal the workings of this unique structure in the world, exclusively dedicated to the study and protection of chameleons.

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A gentle scent of humus. The atmosphere is filled with moisture, although a thin stream of fresh air brushes against our faces. Only the pitter-patter of water droplets seems to disturb the tranquility of the place. Yet, hidden in the vegetation, a chameleon is observing us. We are not in the jungle but in Saint-Gingolph, Switzerland! Nestled at the foot of a steep summit overlooking Lake Geneva, this is where we find Sébastien Métrailler, in his room dedicated to the breeding of the Caméléon Center Conservation. "I'm not afraid to start any project," he asserts with a smile. It has been two years since the reptile enthusiast created this unique NGO, exclusively dedicated to the study and protection of chameleons. Since then, he has assembled a first team of four people to carry out the association's activities: a biologist, a terrarium enthusiast, a photographer, and a student. "I didn't want members or associative activities," specifies the president. So no members, but passionate volunteers, all concerned about the cause of chameleons. It is precisely this small associative organization that is its greatest strength! When large institutions get bogged down in endless procedures, the CCC can intervene immediately thanks to its independence and short decision-making chain. "There are plenty of opportunities, and we are very flexible about it. If an idea is interesting and there is someone motivated to try to make it happen, then the project exists," Sébastien

#### **Pampered guests**

congratulates himself.

The chameleons, on the other hand, remain here. As we discuss the ins and outs of the association, these fragile animals are a poignant reminder of the necessity of conservation programs. Two species surround us: the Jackson's chameleon (*Trioceros jacksonii xantholophus*) and the Parson's chameleon (*Calumma parsonii parsonii*). The first, with its three horns and prehistoric appearance, is here for a study project aimed at deepening the understanding of



mountain chameleons, which are highly sensitive to climate and environmental changes. The latter, the largest chameleon species in the world, is threatened by habitat loss. In this 20 m<sup>2</sup> room, where no less than 70 cages are gathered (and 40 more outside), Sébastien counts nearly 90 individuals. But that's not all! Other chameleons, belonging to the association, are also housed in different breeding facilities, making a total of 114 individuals managed between Switzerland and France. To keep track, rigor is essential. "*Each chameleon is identified with its registration number, date of birth, and the numbers of its parents*," Sébastien explains, pointing to the

labels affixed to his installations. "All individuals are listed in a studbook to track

lineages and preserve the widest possible genetic diversity," he adds meticulously. And what organization! The space is perfectly optimized, tidy and clean. The standardized aluminum cages fit together like Tetris, almost concealing the large windows, which offer a glimpse of the forest and the summer facilities where animals can bask in the sun at least part of the year. Because the chameleons are not

neglected! Their well-being is indeed at the heart of their host's concerns. "The goal is certainly to contribute to the conservation of chameleons, but above all, it is to do so with passion," Sébastien assures. Thus, they are provided with optimal comfort in accordance with their very specific needs.

#### A welcome support!

However, a burning question is: what about funding for all these projects? With optimism, Sébastien responds confidently, "If an idea holds water, if it's technically feasible, then it has value and the project is open. How we fund it will come later." Weird, isn't it? But there's no denying it works! Just two years after its opening, its projects are flourishing with research, conservation, and awareness programs in Switzerland, France, and Madagascar. "To go further, we mainly rely on partnerships with other institutions, although there is also the possibility of funding projects through donations," acknowledges the founder of the CCC. Finally, like many associations, this system also relies on volunteering. Involved individuals who give their time and energy to implement conservation actions: that means hope for chameleons!

A DECEMBER OF THE REAL

PROJECTS

ORTRAIT

Ex situ project | ID 0.4

### Thermal preferences and hydroregulation capabilities of mountain chameleons

This project, in partnership with the Center for Biological Studies of Chizé (CEBC), aims at deepening our understanding of the physiological and behavioral needs of mountain chameleons. Through an experimental approach and the population of chameleons (*Trioceros jacksonii xantholophus*) made available by the Caméléon Center Conservation, crucial data on respiration, thermal preferences, and selection of hygrometric environment in this species, will be collected. These results could guide more informed conservation initiatives, strengthening our ability to protect mountain chameleons and preserve their natural habitat.



2023 - 2025



### Sébastien Métrailler COMMITED ENTHUSIAST!

President and founder of the Chameleon Center Conservation, Sébastien Métrailler is first of all an enthusiast. Amidst breeding and travels, he recounts how the idea of creating this NGO dedicated to these curious reptiles came to him.

Was

convinced

I could do

something

In the midst of his animals, at the foot of the Swiss mountains, here is Sébastien Métrailler. He tells us, smiling broadly, how he came by this ambitious idea: founding an association dedicated to the study and conservation of chameleons. Since childhood, he had already developed an admiration for living things. Amused, he remembers pedaling from pond to pond on his brand-new bike to find tadpoles, or spending hours copying books about animals. And in the end... he never stopped! Author or co-author

of several books and articles, Sébastien is a true enthusiast, inexhaustible when it comes to sharing his knowledge. Yet, chameleons were not yet the subject of his works. Indeed, for 40 years, his main passion was turtles! Aquatic ones, to be exact. Since his first specimen at the age of 13, he has traveled the world to observe them and discuss them with specialists. About this, he confides: "All these years, I have kept the same logic: to go into nature to see how these

animals live, and to raise them at home at the same time. It has always been these two aspects that have allowed me to know them and talk about them." And now, he applies this logic to chameleons. How did he transition from turtles to these arboreal lizards? He himself seems hesitant about the origin of this turnaround... Perhaps another childhood dream. In any case, in 2020, the revelation came. He stopped breeding turtles to dedicate himself exclusively to these curious reptiles. His volte-face was in line with the characteristic Swiss rigor: "I don't like to mix things, if I decide now that I'm taking care of chameleons, then I'm fully committed to chameleons!" Yet, after housing these animals at home for two years, Sébastien realized he wanted to give more meaning to his breeding efforts. In this context, he quickly found out – somewhat to his surprise – that, unlike turtles, nothing seemed to be done for their study

or conservation! No association, no community nor large-scale projects! "I was convinced I could do something, and I took the plunge," he explains. Of course, a legal framework had to be given to this project, and an official entity had to be created: the Caméléon Center Conservation was born. But to ensure the sustainability of this venture, a team had to be assembled and partners

**99** found. Initially joined by Olivier Marquis, Sébastien signed a few weeks later a scientific cooperation agreement with the National Museum of Natural History in Paris and the NGO L'Homme et l'Environnement, manager of the Vohimana reserve in Madagascar. "Choosing the team is crucial," he emphasizes. "Finding the right people and enabling them to manage actions makes the association autonomous. That's the real objective behind this project."

In situ project | ID 7.0

## Correlations between chameleons and plants

This research project, in partnership with the Paris Zoological Park and the NGO L'Homme et L'Environnement, is part of a Master's program in Biology at the University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland), and aims at studying the plant-chameleon relationship in the Vohimana reserve, Madagascar. Drawing on the local knowledge of Malagasy guides, this study will examine the habitat preferences of chameleons based on plant characteristics as microhabitats. These results will have a direct impact on the conservation of chameleons and their habitat, while emphasizing the importance of collaboration with local communities.



on Center

#### In situ project | ID 6.1

# A global approach to the conservation of the world's largest chameleon

The Parson's chameleon (*Calumma parsonii*) is the largest species of chameleon in the world. This project aims at obtaining in-depth knowledge of its ecology, crucial information for conservation, and effective application of this knowledge in the Vohimana reserve with the involvement of local communities. The essential involvement of Malagasy guides from the reserve will thus guarantee a practical implementation of the results within their reserve. A first step was taken in 2023, with the installation of temperature and humidity recorders on trees inhabited by this species.



Ex situ project | ID 6.2

# A global approach to the conservation of the world's largest chameleon

The Parson's chameleon (*Calumma parsonii*) has been classified by the IUCN as "Near Threatened" (NT), but the rapid decline of its population makes this chameleon close to being classified as an endangered species. *Ex situ* work will make it possible to set up a sustainable captive population in European zoological facilities, participating in educational and research programs to increase awareness and generate essential knowledge for its conservation.



### THE PARSONII PROJECT: A STUDY TO GO GREEN FOR A SPECIES IN THE RED!

In 2022, the Caméléon Center Conservation was founded. With over a third of chameleon species facing extinction, this association works to enhance scientific knowledge and conserve these peculiar reptiles worldwide. Their latest mission? The "Parsonii Project," aimed at preserving an emblematic species from Madagascar.

Hidden at the top of the canopy, I exclusively inhabit a narrow strip of humid primary forest along the East coast of Madagascar. Although my family is renowned for changing color rapidly, I prefer to remain discreet... So discreet that I was initially called "Cameleonis rarissima," the rare chameleon. Yet, I don't go unnoticed: at 70 cm long, I am the world's largest chameleon: the Calumma parsonii! As a gentle giant, I leisurely roam the branches and observe the world from above. In September 2023, it was precisely from the treetops of the Vohimana reserve that I saw a group of humans with peculiar behaviors approaching... Three young volunteers, accompanied by local guides, were busy attaching small devices to the trees I frequent. After inquiring, I found out that it was actually the first step of a conservation project about me: the Parsonii Project. It was initiated by a Swiss association: the Caméléon



Center Conservation, which works to safeguard my family, how lucky I am!

Let's get back to these small devices. I examined them closely; they are sensors that will spy on my every move for at least a year. That's what I would call peeping! Their goal? To collect all sorts of data about my environment and habits to facilitate my conservation. Alright, I admit I may be too discreet... and a better understanding of my lifestyle will surely help protect my species more effectively. But why so much effort? Well, it turns out I am almost threatened... It's not me saying it, it's the IUCN: the International Union for Conservation of Nature. According to them, if my populations continue to decline as rapidly, I will soon be reclassified as endangered... We chameleons are more threatened than other reptiles. Unfortunately for us, 38% of my family's species are at risk of extinction, while "only" 18% of our reptilian cousins are affected. Our worst enemy: habitat loss. Slash-and-burn agriculture, logging, climate change... My forest is disappearing, and we are slow, powerless animals... Fortunately for me, as a gentle giant, I am more charismatic to your eves. By making me a symbol of Madagascar's fragile biodiversity, you encourage the preservation of my entire family, thank you!

### PhD

Proposal No. 1 Community assembly rules and resource partitioning in Malagasy chameleon communities: a critical test of the ectomorph concept?

### Work package 1 **Field data collection**

We will quantify the use of ecological niches for the 13 species of chameleons that make up the community in the Vohimana reserve. Madagascar. This community is of interest due to its specific and morphological diversity. Additionally, it includes the largest (Calumma parsonii) as well as some of the smallest chameleons (Brookesia). We will analyze their habitat, feeding. and thermal preferences using non-invasive methods. These unprecedented data will be crucial for considering both in situ and ex situ conservation projects.

### Work package 3 **Axes of differentiation**

Using collections from the National Museum of Natural History in Paris and elsewhere, we will compare chameleon communities from five regions of Madagascar. We will assess their community composition (species diversity) and morphological occupation (morphological diversity) to test if the concept of ecomorph, observed in Caribbean Anolis, applies to chameleons. We will examine the morphology of 30 individuals of each species at each site, where possible, to understand intra- and interspecific variation

### Form ~ function relationships

Work package 2

To understand how morphological variation can allow for niche partitioning among chameleons, we will study the species in the Vohimana reserve. We will measure their physical performances, such as bite and grip strength, as well as sprint speed. We will also film prey capture and quantify tongue projection performance using high-speed wearable cameras. Finally, we will examine their thermal dependence and measure physiological limits for each species.

### Work package 4 **Ecological niches modeling**

Using data from the previous chapters, we will model ecological niches to assess the ability of Vohimana communities to persist under various climate change scenarios. We will establish mechanistic niche models taking into account the biology and physiology of species, providing more accurate predictions than traditional models. We will calculate response surfaces based on temperature and body size of chameleons, which we will use to predict their future distribution in Madagascar.

# Projects

### Proposal No. 2

Body size and integrative ecology in Malagasy chameleon communities: implications for their conservation? How body size drive chameleon ecology.

### Work package 1 **Field data collection**



Two three-month field missions will be conducted in Madagascar, during winter and summer, to study seasonal variations in chameleon abundance in the Vohimana. Maroieiv. and Montagne d'Ambre reserves. Each reserve is selected for the diversity of its communities and the size range of the species composing them. We will use guadrats along transects and nocturnal surveys to inventory the species. Metabolic, morphological, and habitat data will be collected, providing crucial information for chameleon conservation

### Work package 3 **Body size and** population size

To understand the impact of body size on individual abundance at the landscape scale, we will estimate population density and size based on field-collected data. We will use statistical methods to assess densities at three study sites, considering the sampled habitat area and individual detection. These efforts will provide crucial data for conservation, aligned with IUCN assessment criteria, and may serve as a basis for a model estimating population size for other taxa.

We will assess the impact of body size on chameleon metabolism by measuring physiological activity in three distinct communities. We will analyze their oxygen consumption and carbon dioxide production to assess their basal metabolism and energy requirements. Metabarcoding analysis will also be conducted on collected feces to identify dietary habits. These analyses will help understand how these parameters influence chameleon behavior and environmental occupancy.



Using the aforementioned data, we will develop ecological niche models to assess the influence of body size on habitat occupation. These models will incorporate metabolic. physiological, and environmental data to predict areas where chameleons are most likely to be present. From these findings, we can map the spatial distributions of the studied species, thereby identifying environmental factors influencing their presence and enhancing conservation strategies by targeting priority species and habitats.

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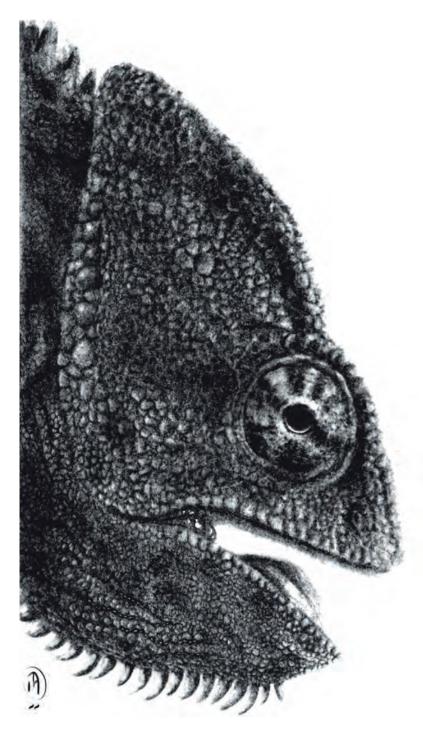






€) €115,000<sup>\*</sup>

3 years



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### How to help us?

We need your support to sustain our current projects and seize all opportunities to start new actions that can contribute to the conservation of chameleons and their ecosystem. There are several ways you can help:

#### Become a partner

Do you want to provide concrete and visible support by becoming one of our partners through your company or organization? Contact us to define together how you can contribute to our association.

#### Buy in our shop

Discover our online shop and our items featuring the official logo of our NGO. Every purchase directly contributes to funding our projects!

### Association Caméléon Center Conservation

Case postale 2, 1898 St-Gingolph SUISSE (1) (2) (1) (2)



www.cameleoncenterconservation.org



### Become a supporting member

Your membership will provide crucial encouragement to continue our chameleon conservation efforts. Individuals: 10./month, Institutions: 25./month

### Aake a donation

A one-time donation or a flexible monthly commitment starting from CHF 1, because every contribution matters and will help support our projects and chameleon conservation efforts.

