

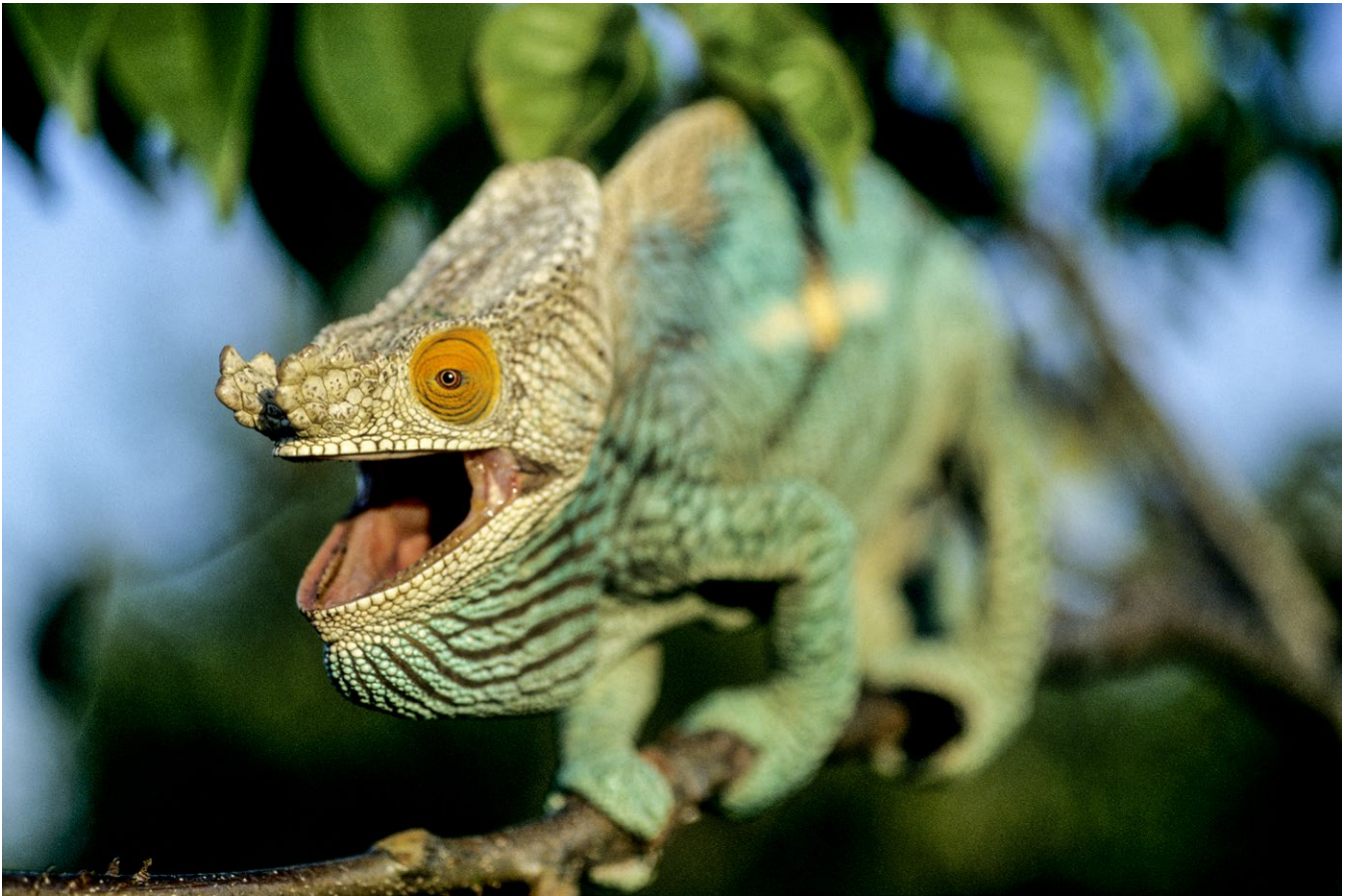
PARSON'S CHAMELEON



CHARACTERISTICS

The chameleon is the unchallenged master of camouflage, and Parson's chameleon is by far the largest specimen in Madagascar and on the planet! The endemic species lives only in the tropical forests in the east of the Red Island. It can be easily recognised by its size. The adult has two outgrowths at the end of its muzzle, and the back of its head extends in the shape of a helmet. Its limbs are stronger and more robust than those of all its fellows. It uses its small horns when it fights other males for a female.

<i>Kingdom</i>	Animal
<i>Phylum</i>	Chordata
<i>Class</i>	Reptilia
<i>Order</i>	Squamata
<i>Family</i>	Chamæleonidæ
<i>Genus</i>	Calumma
<i>Latin name</i>	Calumma parsonii
<i>Weight</i>	up to 1 kg
<i>Size</i>	90 cm
<i>Incubation period</i>	21 months
<i>Number of eggs</i>	20-25
<i>Interval between reproduction</i>	2 years
<i>Diet</i>	Insectivore
<i>Longevity</i>	4 years
<i>CITES</i>	Annexe II



Parson's chameleon (Calumma parsonii) on the look-out.

During a fight, the adversaries change from turquoise blue to threatening red. The vanquished male darkens his colours and goes flat on its belly under the branch. Conversely, the victor puts on even more flamboyant colours. The female couples only once every two years. Oviparous, she digs the soil in which to lay her eggs. Its eyes are completely independent of one another, and give it a very wide field of vision: 360 degrees! The chameleon can watch its prey with one eye and keep the other one open for the approach of possible predators – without even turning its head. It can sit still and watch its victim for hours. Once the victim has been located, the chameleon looks at it with both eyes to obtain a stereoscopic image

that gives it a perfect estimate of its distance. Like a sucker, it catches its prey with the muscled tip of its large tongue covered with sticky saliva. Its



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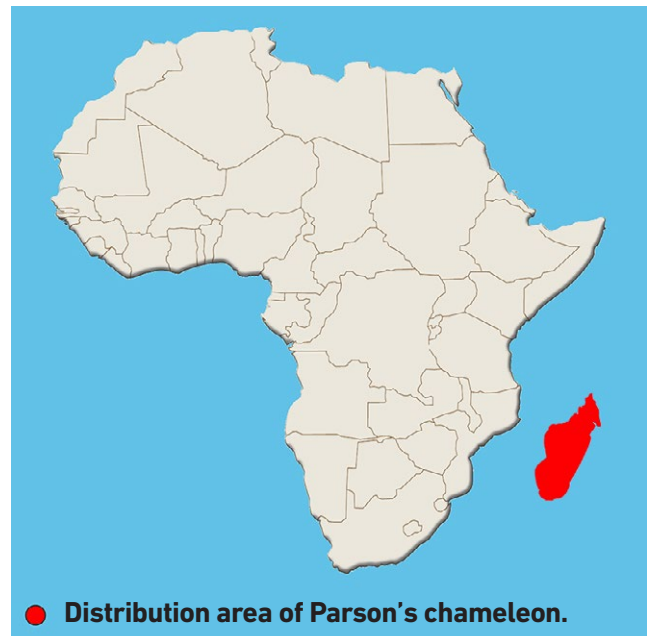
Detail of an eye of a Parson's chameleon.



Female Parson's chameleon.

speed and precision in manœuvring mean that it never misses its target.

An adult eats between 20 and 30 insects per day, and it does not hold back from attacking spiders that are much larger than its mouth; it sometimes even goes for small invertebrates. It hunts by day, mostly in trees, safe from possible predators: snakes, carnivorous mammals, and birds of prey. The reptile is a victim of its own success and is listed in CITES Annexe II. Currently, it is not necessarily in danger of extinction, but it may become so if its trade is not strictly controlled.



● **Distribution area of Parson's chameleon.**

Text by Laurent Tenard - Photographs by Gilles Martin