

A Lost Lizard — Found!

A chameleon makes a surprise reappearance in Madagascar.



Frank Glaw and a female Voeltzkow's chameleon

Chameleons are very special kinds of lizards. They come in all different colors. Some can even *change* their colors to blend in with their surroundings. This skill makes the bright beasts seem to disappear. One species of chameleon really did disappear for about 100 years. Now, researchers have finally found it again!

The not-so-lost lizard is called Voeltzkow's chameleon. It reappeared in northwestern Madagascar. That island nation in Africa is famous for its wildlife. It is home to about half of the 150 species of chameleons in the world. The lizards spend a lot of time in trees or bushes, but Voeltzkow's chameleon was found in a surprising place. "We did not discover the species in a natural forest," researcher Frank Glaw said, "but in a large hotel garden."

Glaw was part of a team from Germany that searched for the chameleon in 2018. The experts recently shared a report on their work. They found several Voeltzkow's chameleons in the garden. Glaw told *News-O-Matic* that finding animals like this is an important step in protecting them. "Species not seen by scientists for many decades or even centuries are likely to be seriously threatened," he explained. The sooner scientists can learn about a creature's risk, the sooner they can help!

Luckily, Glaw doesn't think this lizard is in much danger. That's because it lives over a large area of land. Finding the chameleons at the hotel was a good sign too. Glaw said it shows that Voeltzkow's chameleon can stay alive even as humans make changes in nature.

The scientist added that more research needed to be done on these chameleons though — that is, *if* experts can find more of the creatures! "It is really hard to understand why this splendid chameleon was overlooked for so long," Glaw said. He explained that one reason might be that the lizards' habitat is difficult to get to during the rainy season. Glaw added that the animals may have short lives. "So you have to be in the right place at the right time to be able to detect these chameleons," he said.

Experts already know a bit about Voeltzkow's chameleons. Glaw said the females have a "remarkable" ability to change their color. "Sleeping females on a branch at night are not very colorful," he shared. "Relaxed females are largely green." But when the lady lizards get excited or stressed, they quickly get a new pattern of "black, white, and blue." Males tend to stay green.

Glaw called this reptile research "a great adventure." But he hasn't forgotten another lost lizard in northwestern Madagascar. That chameleon has also been missing for more than 100 years. "The rediscovery of this species will be an important challenge for future expeditions," Glaw said.

The expert shared a message for kids who dream of joining the search for new creatures. "Hundreds or even thousands of species from all over the world are waiting for their rediscovery by you!" Glaw said. "Just keep your eyes open!"

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By *Teresa Johnson*