



# A Closer Look at Chameleons

May 9, 2024

INTERNATIONAL CHAMELEON DAY

## Facts for Kids

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Tip of the (Fast) Tongue

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Habitat, Sweet Habitat



Photo credit: Dr. Tim Eppley



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## INTERNATIONAL CHAMELEON DAY

Here's to celebrating chameleons! Wildlife Madagascar and our many partner organizations are establishing May 9 as a dedicated day each year to appreciate and raise awareness about chameleons and their habitats. In honor of these amazing lizards, we have developed materials that you can use and share for your own chameleon celebration, including fact sheets, activities, and puzzles.

Help spread the word on social media, too, and use the hastags:  
[#chameleonday](#) [#showyourcolors](#) [#internationalchameleonday](#)

### International Chameleon Day Acknowledgments

#### With Gratitude

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Chameleons are a type of lizard that can change their color. They have four layers of skin that make this possible, along with nerve impulses and hormone changes that cause the color cells to grow or shrink. Each chameleon species has a group of patterns and colors that it is able to display.

## Who and Where Are They?

There are more than 200 species of chameleons in the world, and 97 of them are found only in Madagascar. The rest inhabit parts of Africa, Asia, and Europe. The largest are the Madagascar **Oustalet's chameleon** and the **Parson's chameleon**, which can both reach 26 inches (68 centimeters) in length. The smallest is the **nano chameleon**, which measures a tiny 0.9 inches (2.2 centimeters) long.



Photo credit: Ken & Mary Campbell

## Looking Good

Seeing prey, or spotting a predator, is easier for a chameleon because of their special eyes. The chameleon can rotate and focus its eyes separately to look at two different objects at the same time! This gives it a full 360-degree view around its body. When the chameleon spies a meal, both eyes can focus in the same direction to get a clearer view.

## Tip of the (Fast) Tongue

Chameleons are also known for their long, sticky tongues that they use to catch prey. A special group of muscles allows a chameleon to snap its tongue out from 0 to 60 mph in 1/100th of a second! The tip of their tongue is coated with a sticky goo that helps trap its prey, such as crickets, grasshoppers, locusts, and other insects. Some larger chameleons also eat small birds or even other lizards.



## Get a Grip

There's another part of the chameleon that comes in "handy"—its feet! The position and number of toes allows them to grasp branches just like our thumbs and fingers can grip objects. Their tail also helps with life in trees: most have a prehensile tail that can wrap around tree branches while climbing.

## Habitat, Sweet Habitat

Chameleons call lots of habitats home. They live in rainforests, lowlands, deserts, scrub savannas, semi-deserts, and even mountains. Chameleons can live in trees, but some make their home in grass or on small bushes, dry branches, or in fallen leaves.



Photo credit: Dragomir Vujnovic

