

Peyrieras Reptile Reserve, Madagascar

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All photos by the author.

The Perinet Chameleon (*Calumma gastrotaenia*),
seen at night near Andasibe.



INTRODUCTION

The island of Madagascar is considered a global biodiversity hotspot because of its high levels of endemism and the significant threats to its species and habitats (BROOKS et al., 2002). Madagascar has approximately 70 species of endemic chameleons and they occupy a wide range of vegetation types and altitudes. Members of the genus *Calumma* are found in humid forest from sea level to at least 2,800 m, while the genus *Furcifer* occupies a similar altitudinal range but occurs in many types of forest vegetation in addition to heathland and urban areas. The dwarf chameleons, *Brookesia*, are associated with forest vegetation, occurring in both humid and deciduous formations from sea level to elevations of up to 1,875 m (GLAW & VENCES, 2007). A number of chameleon species are only known from a single locality or occupy small areas of suitable habitat.

In June and July 2018 I made a touristic roundtrip in Madagascar, not exactly meant as a herpetological expedition, but with a constant open eye for the nature of the island. This way of traveling turned out to be not the optimal formula to see animals in the wild. Especially chameleons, with their cryptic behaviour and scattered distribution could hardly be observed. A few searches, executed at night, resulted in some observations. Daytime views were extremely rare. Fortunately a reptile reserve made it possible to see a number of different chameleons by daylight, showing their full spectrum of colours and shapes. This short communication is about that reserve and the animals, primarily the chameleons shown there.

PEYRIERAS REPTILE RESERVE (information provided by the staff).

The Peyrieras Reptile Reserve or Madagascar Exotic (also known as the Peyrieras Butterfly Farm, Peyrieras Nature Farm and Mandraka Reptile Farm) is a small privately run reserve situated at Marozevo, on National Road N2, 75 km east of Antananarivo, between the towns of Manjakandriana and Moramanga.

It was founded and owned by the French entomologist and naturalist André Peyri ras (1927-2018) with the aim of breeding chameleons and release them in their natural habitats. Later his daughter Sylviane took over the ownership of the reserve. He discovered over 3,000 new insects. Peyri ras's dwarf chameleon (*Brookesia peyrierasi*), Peyri ras's chameleon (*Calumma peyrierasi*), and Peyri ras's woolly lemur (*Avahi peyrierasi*) are all named after him.

The collection includes many reptiles (chameleons, iguanas, geckos, crocodiles), 'batraciens' (amphibians) and 'papillons' (butterflies). The adjacent forest area supports families of relocated and habituated Verreaux's Sifaka (*Propithecus verreauxi*) and common Brown Lemur (*Eulemur fulvus*) which provide opportunities to photograph them close up at feeding times. A group of Coquerel's Sifaka (*Propithecus coquereli*) return daily to be fed and to aid photography by the tourists.

THE VISIT

National road N2 is the most important and virtually the only road leading from the capital Antananarivo to the country's main port Toamasina (Tamatave). Literally everything, from men to goods, including oil products is being transported over this road. In addition, the relative numerous tourists traveling to the popular Andasibe-Mantadia National Park and adjacent parks have to take this road.

Although basically paved, the two lane road is often locally in a very bad condition. In addition steep climbs (over altitudes as high as 2,000 m), descents and sharp curves have to be mastered. Because of these conditions transport is difficult and time consuming. Therefore the reserve is a very welcome stop-over, roughly half-way coast and capital.

The reserve is situated on a large and spacious area in a gently sloping environment. Most of the reptiles and other species are held within several large caged buildings and greenhouses, which tourists may enter when accompanied by a guide. Here they breed many of Madagascar's rare and endangered reptiles, frogs and insects.

seems to be rather overcrowded, at least according to the general vivarium practice. Nevertheless no obvious disorders could be observed during the relative short visit. Animal behaviour looked normal. No stress reaction, discoloration or other deviant reactions could be seen. On top of that the animals all looked healthy without any sign of malnutrition, deficiencies or scars or wounds. In addition both sexes of the same species were living next to each other without obvious discomfort. A large number of Panther Chameleons (*F. pardalis*) in various colour variations were active without any negative reaction towards each other nor towards the visitors, remarkable since the species is said to have a very intolerant character (MCGEOUGH, 2016). The obligate grasshopper hunting for the public was executed by several species. According to the accompanying guide most species breed without any problem under these conditions. Similarly constructed smaller cages house other animals, including iguanas (*Oplurus* specs.), in hibernation during the visit, geckos and other lizards. Other cages house several other reptiles, frogs, fruit bats and tenrecs.



Enclosures of various shapes and sizes.

After the simple entrance and reception building an open area is situated, consisting of a small lake in a grass environment, fenced with brick walls. A couple of Nile Crocodiles (*Crocodylus niloticus*) are housed there. The largest cage (ca. 60x20x3 m) is located in a more overgrown area. On top of low brick walls rough-mesh screens, attached to wooden poles are fastened. The housing is exposed to natural conditions of sunshine, rain and wind. Dense vegetation provide plenty of shade and shelter. In that cage some 60 chameleons are housed comprising about eight species of larger chameleons like *Furcifer oustaleti*, *F. pardalis* and *Calumma parsonii*. On first impression the housing

In some of those smaller enclosures even smaller cages are placed (with screen walls of adapted mesh size). In those housings the smallest chameleons are housed as well as small geckos and insects. Several of these animals could be taken out for photographic purposes without causing any apparent stress to the animals. It is really impressive to see miniature species like *F. wilsii*, *F. lateralis*, *C. gallus*, *C. malthe* and many others in just a one hour visit, not to speak of all the other animals that are extremely hard to find in nature. In total some 20 different species of chameleons were housed in the Reserve at the time of the visit. The small picture book included here shows just a few of the species.

Colour variants of *Furcifer pardalis*.



LITERATURE

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Calumma parsoni, female left, male right.



Calumma gallus, male left, female right.



Furcifer lateralis.