

Unit 1: A Chameleon's Colors

Narrator: There are 202 species of chameleon in the world, that scientists know about. 42 percent of these different types of chameleons live in Madagascar.

These creatures are famous for their ability to change color. For a long time, scientists thought chameleons changed color to hide from other animals. But now they know that the main reason chameleons change color is to communicate with each other. Chameleons can change color to attract other chameleons or to warn them to go away. They can use their colors to show that they are angry or scared. Sometimes, their colors also change because of changes in the temperature.

So, if chameleons don't change colors to hide from predators, how do they stay safe?

It turns out that chameleons stay safe by moving back and forth in a strange way. By following this odd system of movements, the chameleon looks less like a moving animal, and more like a leaf being blown by the wind.

A chameleon's tongue is very long and moves very fast. To catch food, a chameleon hides in the trees until an insect walks by. Then it shoots out its tongue to catch the insect. A chameleon can catch insects as far away as two times its body length. A chameleon's tongue is made of bone and muscles. And the end of its tongue is very sticky. The muscles at the back of the tongue prepare the sticky parts to shoot out—just like how a person pulls back the string of a bow to get ready to shoot an arrow. Then they let go! The tongue shoots forward at a great speed, and the insect is caught in the blink of an eye.

Chameleons are amazing creatures. But like many other animals, they're in trouble. Many species of chameleons are endangered. This is because the forests and other areas where they live are disappearing or are being changed by people. And when the area is changed too much, it becomes hard for chameleons to live there.

Scientists are working to help endangered chameleon species, by learning as much as they can about these colorful creatures.