



A beautiful *Calumma gallus* male in a relaxed mood. This species has been assessed as Endangered by the IUCN as it inhabits approximately 3,909 square kms in the eastern forests of Madagascar, where there is a continuing decline in the forest habitat due to slash-and-burn agriculture, cattle grazing and timber extraction, and because it occurs as a severely fragmented population.

MADAGASCAR MARVEL **THE CYRANO CHAMELEON**

TINY, RARE AND ENDANGERED
**AN INCREDIBLY
BEAUTIFUL LIZARD**
FROM THE RAINFORESTS
OF THE RED ISLAND



This species is found in eastern Madagascar, in several areas including Ambavaniasy, Ampasimbe, Andekaleka, Betampona, Ile aux Prunes, Karianga, Lokomby, Mahanoro, Manombo, Vohidrazana and Zahamena.

TEXT BY ALEXANDRA LAUBE
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

In the middle of nowhere in Eastern Madagascar, there lives an amazing tiny chameleon species hiding deep in dense bushes as well as 2 m up on the trees. We were lucky to have some great local guides to show us exactly the right place in late April, at the end of the rainy season, when most chameleon females are already pregnant and males still show their brightest colours. Several small areas in the region of Vohemana, near Andasibe, are home to the Cyrano chameleon *Calumma gallus*, and this is where - with some luck and even more patience - we could finally spot a few individuals of this amazing creature. *Calumma gallus* is a small and endangered chameleon species, which only lives in the mid-altitude rainforests of eastern

Madagascar in small fragmented relicts of its original habitat. When adult, they only reach a body length of 6 cm maximum, but especially males can show a firework of different colours to express their mood and impress us as silent visitors. When spotted, *Calumma gallus* appear mostly just grey or even dark brown – they're in anger. But wait a moment, let them calm down on a small branch and you'll see their real beauty: white with bright blue spots, changing in a few seconds back to a brownish colours seeing a predator or another male. The spear-like rostral appendage of males has a glowing pink tip, some blue dots and a green base colour - probably it's a sign to attract females, but no one really knows yet. Although they partially live inside

official National Parks, *Calumma gallus* is threatened by decline of its habitat. In Madagascar huge areas, even inside the Parks, are being burned down for agricultural land and used for cattle grazing. Another big problem is the illegal market for expensive and rare rainforest timber. And illegal chameleon trade (Madagascar has had a zero quota on export for this species for years) plays a bigger role every year - especially if exact GPS data of habitats were published somewhere (so we are not giving any!). Today, no one really knows how many individuals of this species are left in Madagascar - and for how long they will be able to survive in their small surviving habitats, separated from the rest of the population by insuperable barriers.



■ A portrait of an adult *Calumma gallus* male clearly shows the small size attained by this endangered species. Rainforest within its range, both intact and degraded, survives only as small isolated patches and is under continuing pressure. The population is therefore considered to be both severely fragmented and declining.



The colorful nose "horn" which has provided *Calumma gallus* with its colloquial nickname Cyrano Chameleon is immediately obvious here, but is only present on mature males.

A comparison between the male (left and bottom right photos) and the female of the species (top right photo) clearly demonstrates the strong sexual dimorphism shown by the Cyrano Chameleon *Calumma gallus*.





■ This species has been found in low elevation rainforest and degraded mid-altitude forest. The low-elevation humid forests and littoral forests this species occupies are at risk from accidental burning, degradation from cattle grazing, timber extraction for fuel, construction and charcoal production. The Cyrano Chameleon is of interest to the international pet trade, but this should not be considered a major threat at this time.



A frontal close-up portrait of the enchanting but highly endangered Cyrano Chameleon *Calumma gallus* showing its quirky, colorful nasal appendage - whose presence in adult males still baffles researchers.