

The amazing Satanic Leaf Gecko
**MADAGASCAR'S
MASTER OF DISGUISE**

■ One of Madagascar's most bizarre and sought-after species, the Satanic Leaf Gecko *Uroplatus phantasticus* owes its common name to the "horns" above its eyes, which give it an unmistakably devilish look. This male was photographed at night - when the species becomes active - in the forest of Ranomafana National Park.

A RARE ENCOUNTER WITH A DEVILISH-LOOKING, COMPLETELY HARMLESS AND STUNNINGLY BEAUTIFUL REPTILE SPECIES ENDEMIC TO THE RED ISLAND

■ The extraordinary livery and the gaunt, crooked appearance of *Uroplatus phantasticus* help it to successfully blend with the foliage of the low-level forest canopy where this species is found.

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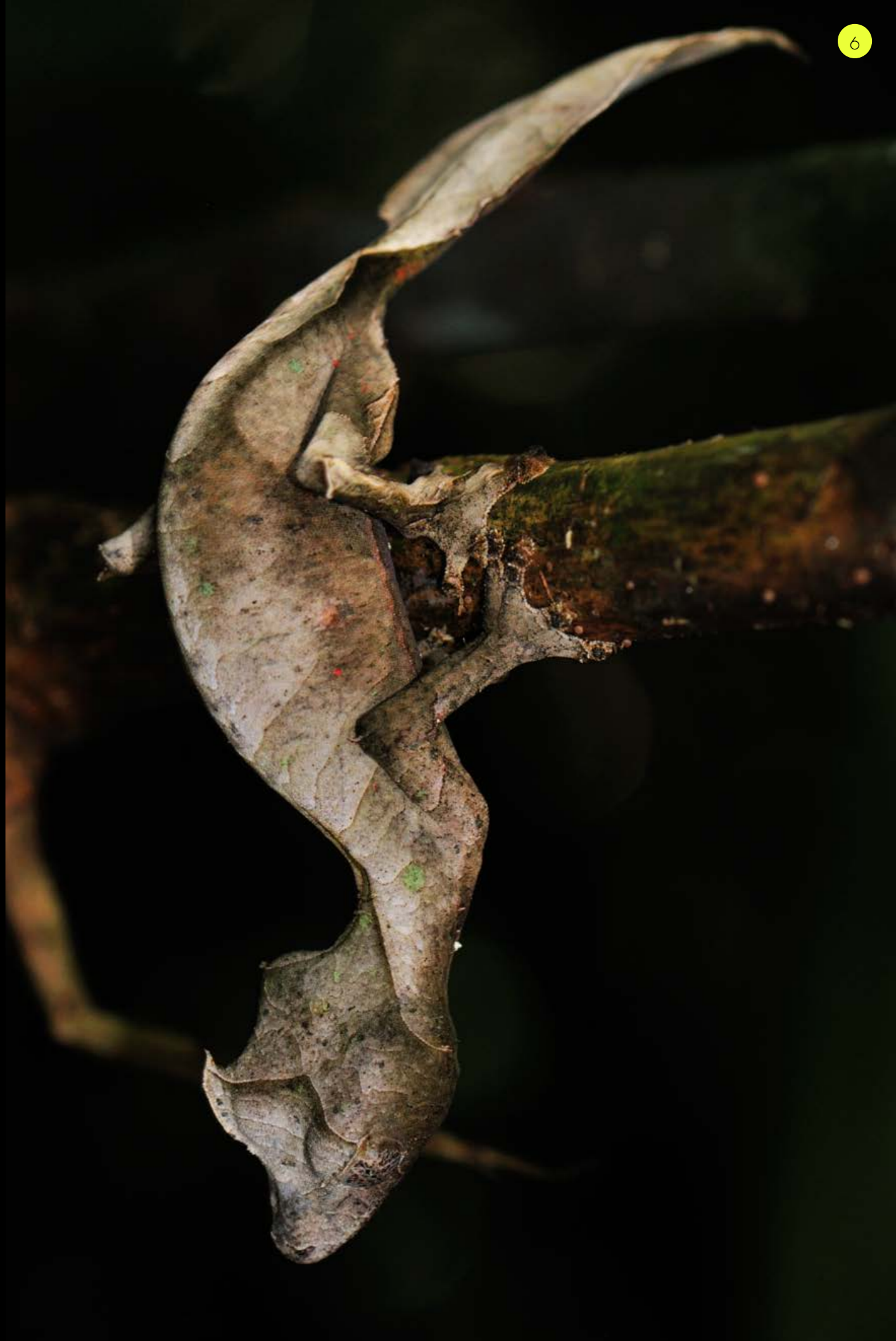
The amazing Satanic Leaf Gecko *Uroplatus phantasticus* reigns supreme - in our opinion - among the most bizarre of Madagascar's fascinating reptile species. A strictly nocturnal animal, it was high on our wish list when we visited Ranomafana National Park thanks to our friends at [TanalaHorizon](#), and we soon sighted several individuals during our treks inside the rainforest - both during the day, when they rest curled up looking exactly like a dead leaf, and at night, when they actively prowl the low bushes looking for prey. It is usually

observed at heights of between 0.5 and 2 m above ground. Its stunning camouflage, its finely ornamented livery and its devilish looks make this completely harmless little gecko a real visual treat! This leaf-tailed gecko is endemic to Madagascar, where it has been recorded from many localities in the central-east of the island. It occurs from 400 m asl., reaching as high as 1,300 m in Andringitra, and has an estimated extent of occurrence of 41,507 km². This species is locally abundant, although as a forest-dependent species it is likely that the population is

declining. A nocturnal lizard that lives in relatively intact humid forest, it can tolerate only very light levels of disturbance, and is unlikely to persist in forests subject to heavy logging. The Satanic Leaf Gecko used to be exported from Madagascar for the international pet trade, but there is currently no legal export of it, and illegal exploitation is likely to be low. However, captive breeding occurs only in low numbers, and this species is currently threatened by the loss and degradation of humid forest due to logging, cattle grazing and farming.

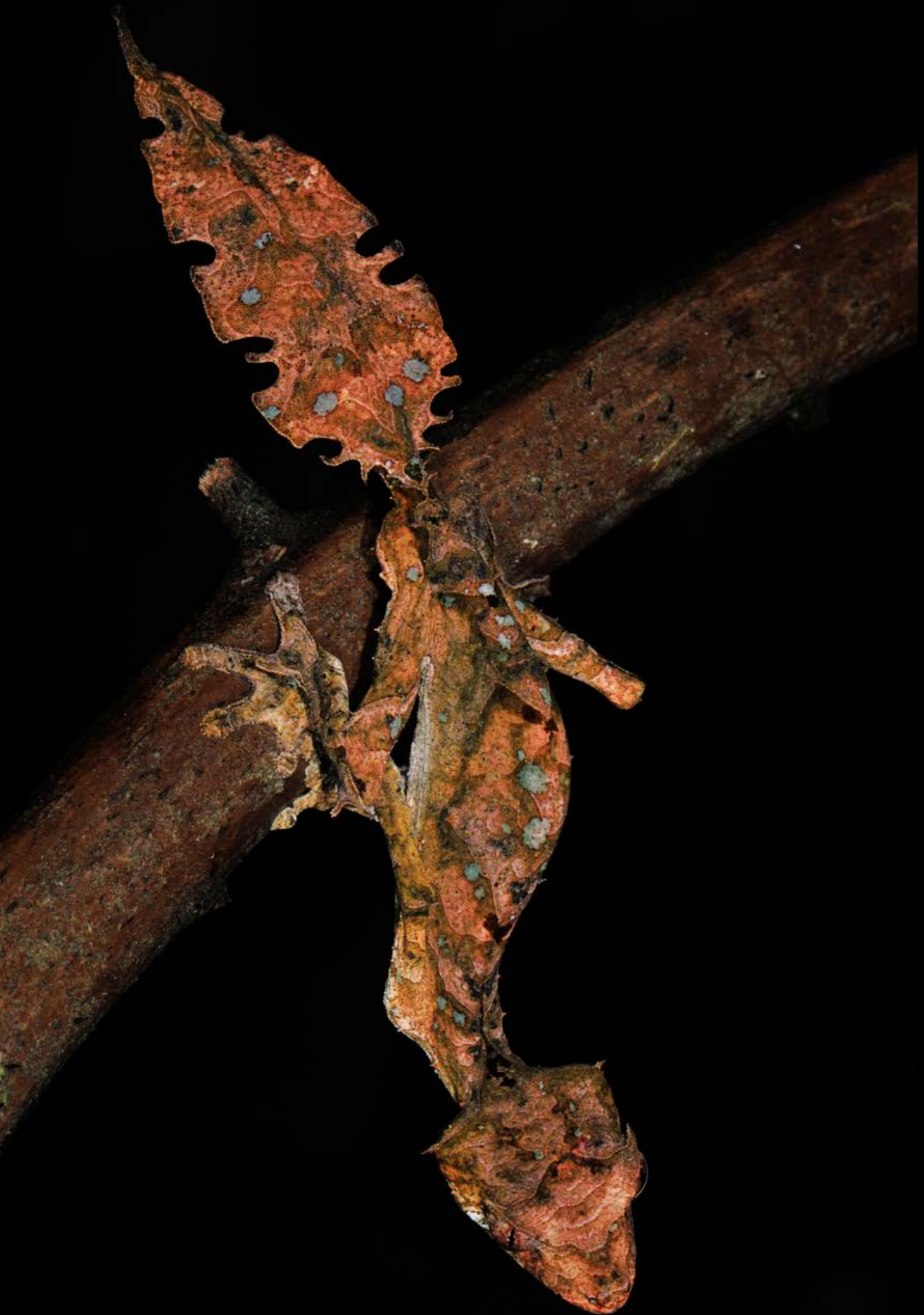


Genetic data have revealed that *Uroplatus phantasticus* is in fact a complex of several species, with a full taxonomic revision being required. It is included in CITES Appendix II, but more research is needed into its taxonomy, the limits of its distribution, its population status, and harvest levels. Both specimens illustrated in this page are females, as can be seen by the undented tail margins of the individual at right.





Confirmed localities for this species include the Angavo-Anjozorobe corridor, Iofa, Didy and Andriantantely, Mantadia, Zahamena, Betampona, Fierenena, Ranomafana and Vohidrazana.




■ Males of *Uroplatus phantasticus* (left) can be recognized by the indented margins of their leaf-like tail and by the generally more colorful livery. As this is a strictly nocturnal species, most day images of *Uroplatus phantasticus* are in fact - however spectacular - posed shots of captured animals.





When resting by day,
Uroplatus phantasticus curls
up among the foliage of
small trees and low bushes,
pretending - usually with
great success - to be a bunch
of dead leaves. The
camouflage of this species is
indeed phenomenal, and
spotting one in the forest is
anything but easy.

The image is a composite of two photographs. The left photograph shows a male Uroplatus phantasticus gecko clinging to a brown, textured tree branch. The gecko's body is covered in intricate, mottled patterns of brown, tan, and white, which perfectly match the bark of the branch. The right photograph shows a female Uroplatus phantasticus gecko on a similar branch. This female has a more uniform, brownish-tan coloration with some darker spots, also providing excellent camouflage against the surrounding foliage and branches. The background in both photos is dark, making the geckos and their environment stand out.

Both the male (left) and the female (right) of this species can be amazingly colorful and patterned. The cryptic livery and sinuous stance habitually taken by *Uroplatus phantasticus* make it however literally disappear among the foliage of the Malagasy rainforest.



This fascinating species (or complex of species) displays an enormous amount of variability, and not two specimens are completely alike. What is recurrent in all *Uroplatus phantasticus* individuals is the exceptionally effective camouflage effect and the richly patterned livery.

