# Newly Discovered Chameleons in Mozambique

***Prelims:*** *Current events of national & international importance | Biodiversity & Conservation*

## Why in News?

*Recently, Scientists have discovered four new pygmy chameleon species in northern Mozambique's isolated mountain ecosystems, known as sky islands.*

- **Chameleon –** They are specialised *lizards from the Old World*.
- They can change colour thanks to special skin layers with tiny crystals.
- This colour change is mainly used for communication and controlling body temperature, not just for hiding.

*A **pygmy chameleon** is a general term used for the miniature forest chameleons belonging mainly to the genera Rhampholeon and Nadzikambia.*

- **Order –** Squamata (scaled reptiles).
- **Family –** Chamaeleonidae (chameleons).
- **Genus –** Nadzikambia
- **Morphology –** Small, miniature forest chameleons with cryptic colouration and camouflage abilities.
- **Habitat & Distribution –** Endemic to high-altitude rainforest pockets of northern Mozambique.
- **Behaviour –** Arboreal, slow-moving, rely on camouflage;
- **Diet –** Insectivorous.
- **Vision –** Independently movable eyes providing a nearly 360° field of view.
- **Camouflage Adaptation** – All exhibit cryptic colouration, blending seamlessly into leaf litter and forest understory.
- **Reproductive Strategy** – Oviparous (egg-laying), typical of chameleons.

## 4 New identified species (Pygmy Chameleon)

| Species Name | Named for | Distinctive Trait |
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| **Nadzikambia goodallae** | Jane Goodall (conservation legacy), it is endemic to one sky island. | Strong camouflage in dense montane rainforest. |

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| **Nadzikambia franklinae** | Rosalind Franklin (molecular biology). | Subtle genetic and morphological divergence (scale pattern, body proportions). |
| **Nadzikambia evanescens** | Evanescens means vanishing. | Restricted to shrinking montane forest patches, emphasizes conservation urgency due to habitat loss. |
| **Nadzikambia nubile** | Nubila means clouded, reflecting dependence on persistent cloud cover for survival. | Adapted to the cloud-forest microclimate at high altitude. |




**Quick Fact**

| **Sky Islands** |
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| • **Definition** – *Isolated Mountain ranges* surrounded by radically different, arid lowland environments, creating unique, high-elevation habitats.<br>• **Climate** – Moist high-altitude zones support rainforest even when the surrounding lowlands are dry.<br>• **Evolutionary Significance** – Isolation drives speciation, resulting in high endemism.<br>• **Examples -** Madrean Sky Islands in Arizona/Mexico, Western Ghats in India (Shola forests).<br>• **Ecological Importance –** Sky islands act as natural research sites for studying speciation; a high proportion of endemic species is critical for conservation biology. |

**References**

1. TOI | Chameleon
2. The Conservation | Chameleon



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