

Newly Discovered Chameleons in Mozambique

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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
Nadzikambia goodallae	Jane Goodall (conservation legacy), it is endemic to one sky island.	Strong camouflage in dense montane rainforest.

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

- **Definition** - *Isolated Mountain ranges* surrounded by radically different, arid lowland environments, creating unique, high-elevation habitats.
- **Climate** - Moist high-altitude zones support rainforest even when the surrounding lowlands are dry.
- **Evolutionary Significance** - Isolation drives speciation, resulting in high endemism.
- **Examples** - Madrean Sky Islands in Arizona/Mexico, Western Ghats in India (Shola forests).
- **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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