



# A Patient Hunter

Mark C. Mifsud

At 5.00 o'clock in the morning on the third of January I woke up with an unusual desire to stroll through Wied Hamiem, a valley that lies in between Paceville and Pembroke. The scenic valley is literally choked with an invasion of the alien castor oil plant, with its huge pinnate leaves and reddish branches. The air was misty and cold? And the green landscape was randomly

Believing that it was unseen, the chameleon adopted its favorite tactic to escape predators.. camoutlage. The reptile stood motionless in the cold misty surroundings with a green colour akin to the brightly coloured fig leaves. Great opportunity for a photographer!

After poking the camera lens into the chameleons face a couple of times it came to

the unjust conclusion that I am probably a dangerous kind of creature attempting an attack. This prompted the chameleon to quickly change colour, widen its scaly body by tightening particular areas of muscles, get hold of a low lying branch with its prehensile tail (that serves as an extra limb open its rigid mouth and breath out in a most absorbing routine.

This normally has the effect of persuading the would be attacker to let go of such a terrible and dangerous creature.

Unfortunately for the chameleon, this act only increased my interest in the animal which was then subjected to bear the view of my camera lens a little longer, while it forced itself to produce such an entertaining performance. After a few seconds the chameleon decided to retreat from such a dangerous location presumably grumbling on how such an impeccable display of force didn't manage to deter what appeared to be a stubborn, ignorant and colourful creature. Clumsily, the chameleon disappeared in the midst of green leaves.

The chameleon was brought to Malta from Northern Africa by the Jesuit priests who seemed to be particularly fond of this peculiar reptile. This specific incident happened between 1846 and 1865. A number of these chameleons were let loose in a college run by the same priests which seems to have ceased existing nowadays. Nonetheless, the chameleons adapted well to the climatic and

ecological conditions present in Malta and started to increase in number. The Chameleon that is found in this tiny piece of rock in the Mediterranean is the Chameleon. or the Mediterranean Chameleon. The chameleons mate and deposit 20 to 30 eggs in a hole in the soil from which the tiny new chameleons emerge.

The chameleon has an ability to change colour in response to light, heat, and other stimuli like me. The range of colours is limited to shades of green, yellow, or brown.. The belief that if put on a red colour chameleons die is untrue as chameleons are simply not able to change into red. The chameleon would probably die of mishandling instead.

A number of people are attracted by the undeniable charm of the chameleon and capture one (or more) to put in their garden. In so doing, they would be confining the chameleon to a small garden; at best to lead a monotonous life, with no chance to bear young; worse still to end up as cat food or die by excessive handling from valiant children. Regretfully, although infrequently, one still encounters children who keep chameleons in cages or try to sell them. Both parents and children should note that the chameleon is listed in the Bern Convention and the European community directive of 1992. The chameleon has also been included in the list of protected species in the Maltese islands from 1992? Therefore it is illegal to keep or capture one of these reptiles. Alternatively, test your patience by observing trees to glimpse the elusive patient hunter.



speckled with yellow coloured flowers, most of which belonged to the Cape Sorrell and the crown daisy .

Next to an old twisted and undecided fig tree was a profusion of nettles with dainty but stingy leaves. The leaves were magically rendered with shiny pointed stars as dewdrops were densely covering the leaves, and falling prey to the suns rays. Slowly but gradually, my tattered jeans and second hand Puma slipper were imbibing the cold fresh dewdrops, which greatly helped to increase the sense of numbness in my feet. In a moment of hesitation I slipped and (unfortunately for some) landed unhurt in a dishonourable sitting down position. This proved to be a lucky incident as a swift movement on a fig branch above me caught my eye. A grasshopper had just become attached to an extremely long tongue, with a club shaped mucous covered tip, property of a particularly dark, unusually large chameleon.

Distracted by the noise of my stumbling body, the chameleon immediately focused one of its independently rotating protruding eyes on me.

