



Wednesday 6 February, 2013

CARNIVAL WATCH

Carnival delegations touch down today!

This morning, at 7:05am, flight EK 707 landed in Seychelles. On most days, that wouldn't be a newsworthy event – but not when it's jam-packed full of delegations coming for Carnaval!

Teams from the Notting Hill Carnival Roadshow Company, the Brazilian Golden Rose Samba School, South Korea, Indonesia, China, India, Italy and Mauritius are all here ready to paint the town red, green, blue, yellow and a myriad of other colours come Carnaval which kicks off on Friday.

The team representing the Notting Hill Carnival Roadshow (which is coming to Seychelles for the 3rd time in a row – complete

with soca, calypso and samba dancers) also intends to host workshops, teaching local youngsters about the history of carnivals and their evolution as a performance art-form.

The main ambition for the group



A plane-load of Carnaval delegations landed in Seychelles this morning

is to leave their impression on Mahé by inspiring local youth to carve out their own granitic-edged identity for Carnaval.

This year's cast will comprise three masquerade groups (*BeeR-aaHaar Carnival Club, Flamingo*

Carnival Arts and Mahogany Carnival Arts), one samba group called *Paraiso de Samba*, a soca group called *Ruff Diamond*, one steel-band group and a DJ well-versed in the best Carnaval rhythms!

There will be 40 individual performers, and world-renowned photographer Kiki Nortey will be here to snap away. Although the group couldn't come en masse, they are sure that they're going to stamp our parades with their trademark groove.

Claire Holder, the chairperson of the group, said that "We're excited to be coming to Seychelles once again, and this year we hope to engage with the people of Seychelles and the region to contribute to what is a fantastic celebration!"

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Long-lost chameleon rediscovered in Seychelles

Species forgotten since 1820s finally reveals its true colours

By J. RIGBY TODAY



The team rediscovered this spotted chameleon, known as the 'Archaius scyhellensis,' which seems to be thriving

For nearly 200 years, many have thought that the book of reptology had been well and truly written for Seychelles; there was only one local shifty lizard. Case closed.

But, as it turns out, there are TWO colour-changing lizards that call these islands their home, and their fascinating story goes back to early 19th century Paris, where two containers had been gathering dust until recently.

A team of researchers, headed by Dr. Chris Raxworthy, announced the discovery on 1 February at the International Conference Centre Seychelles (ICCS).

During the presentation, team members comprising Bärbel Koch, Anna Gray and Marc Jean-Baptiste,

recounted how they had searched the Island of Silhouette using torchlight after sunset and found 26 chameleons belonging to a long-forgotten species known as *Archaius scyhellensis*.

Later, TODAY in Seychelles met with Dr. Raxworthy, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History, to find out more about the project – and what it means for lizard-lovers across Seychelles.

"A few years ago, we did a population abundance survey on Vallée de Mai, and found lots of chameleons there – we thought: 'Oh my goodness, what's going on?'" said Dr. Raxworthy.

When the team started checking studies on chameleons in Seychelles, they stumbled across an

1820 essay by Kuhl that described TWO distinct species in Seychelles.

"We found out that two samples had been collected at that time and put in a Paris museum. One was the Seychelles Tiger Chameleon and the other was labelled as the *Archaius scyhellensis*," narrates Dr. Raxworthy.

However, within 15 years, the two distinctive records had been lumped together... and that was that. Everyone thought that Kuhl had made an error and Seychelles only had one tree-hugging lizard.

The records were subsequently shelved... until 2010.

"When we were working here in 2009, we realized that the chameleons here showed two different genetics. Looking into the history, I discovered that specimens had been deposited in the Paris museum, and went there specifically to look for them a year later," he says.

Dr. Raxworthy says that when he found the specimens, they had clearly never been opened or looked at since the 1820s; even the original pigs' bladders were still stretched over them (it was a way of preserving specimens.)

"When we looked at them, the beautiful thing was that each specimen corresponded to the two species on Seychelles. There was a green form and a spotted form," stated Dr. Raxworthy.

The two species have normally been lumped together under one



Previously, many thought that the Seychelles Tiger Chameleon, pictured above, was the only chameleon in Seychelles

Creole name – *Kameleon* – but they have several important morphological differences by the way of their crests, body and skin.

Conducting the survey, the team discovered that finding the amphibians is a lot easier after dark, when our forests really come to life. So far, they have discovered over 200 chameleons on their nightly patrols – throwing a spanner into the belief that they are rare.

"Chameleons are not as endangered as people thought previously – there are way more than 2,000!" proclaimed Dr. Raxworthy.

The positive repercussions of this study will widen our biodiversity and increase our environmental value as a result, says the researcher.

With chameleons being a flagship species – that is, a species symbolic of biodiversity – Dr. Raxworthy says that tourists could be encouraged to

come to Seychelles on "night safaris" and nocturnal walks were they try to spot the sneaky chameleons.

For the immediate future, the team will conduct more fieldwork on the Islands of La Digue and Curieuse, before publishing their research later in the year.

The study has been partly sponsored by the Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF) and the American Museum of Natural History.



Dr. Raxworthy points out the physiological differences between the two chameleons during last week's presentation

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