

Veiled chameleon is a threat to native birds and insects

Kia'i Moku

By Joylynn Paman



You may be familiar with the Jackson's chameleon, a small,

curious-looking reptile that moves slowly from one tree branch to another, taking each step with exact precision. It's a creature that often sparks the interest of children who take them to school for "show and tell" or someone looking to purchase an unusual animal at the pet shop.

But have you seen a veiled chameleon? Similar to Jackson's, these chameleons are just as intriguing and possibly more striking, but are illegal in Hawai'i and have become an established pest in Upcountry Maui.

Veiled chameleons were first found on Maui in March 2002. Since then, over 200 veiled chameleons have been captured. Chameleons are not native to Hawai'i and do not belong here. The discovery of pregnant females, mature males, and juveniles indicates that veiled chameleons have established a breeding population on Maui.

Veiled chameleons are originally from Yemen and Saudi Arabia. They eat plants and insects in their native habitat and have been known to dine on small mammals in captivity. They can grow rapidly and attain sexual maturity in 6 months. Females may lay 12-80 eggs in a clutch, with up to 3-4 clutches in a year and may not need to mate again to produce an-

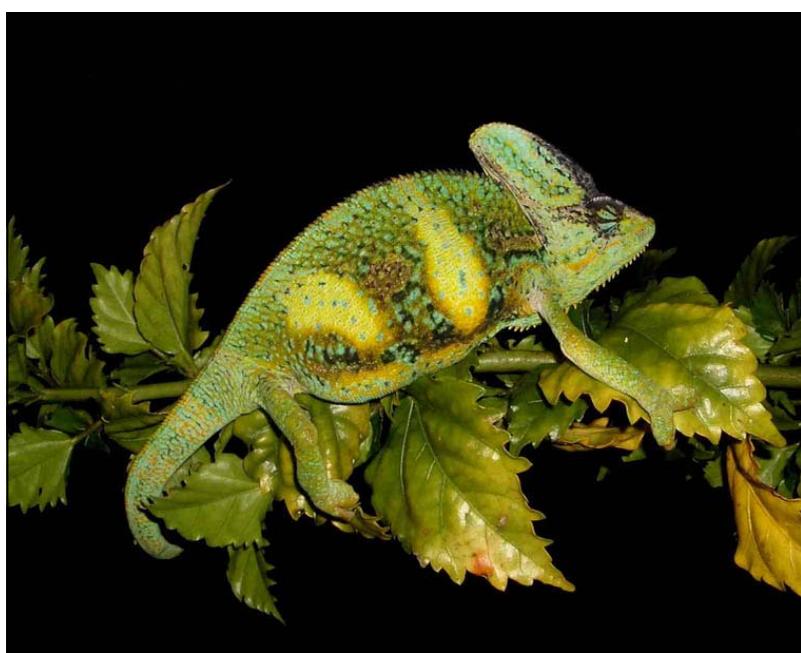
other clutch. After 6-8 months, the eggs hatch creating the next generation of pests.

So why worry?

Veiled chameleons may pose a threat to our native forest birds and insects. Fully-grown veiled chameleons may be capable of eating small birds, such as the native 'apapane, and native insects like the happy face spider. They tolerate tropical and sub-tropical climates, and occupy mountainous regions, plateaus and valleys. They are found at altitudes ranging from 1,700 to 9,500 feet in their native habitat. Most of the veiled chameleons found on Maui have been in Makawao. Because they can live and breed in more areas than the Jackson's chameleon, they can cause more harm to our environment.

How do you tell if you have a veiled chameleon versus a Jackson's chameleon? The easiest way is to look at the head. Unlike the male Jackson's chameleon which has three horns, male veiled chameleons have a casque or shark-fin-like shield ranging from 3-4 inches long on their heads. Females have a much smaller casque. A fleshy fringe runs from under the chin of each animal down the middle line of the body towards the base of the tail. The legs and tail are long and thin. Usually, they are light green with vertical bands of contrasting colors. Veiled chameleons can grow up to two feet in length. Juveniles are usually light green with a small but prominent casque on their head.

Veiled chameleons are invasive and illegal in Hawai'i. It is against the law



Above: Veiled chameleons have a casque, or shark-fin-like shield, on their heads; a fleshy fringe from under the chin down the middle line of the body toward the base of the tail; and long and thin legs and tails. Usually, they are light green with vertical bands of contrasting colors. They can grow up to 2 feet in length. Juveniles are usually light green with a small but prominent casque on their head. (Photo by MISC)

Left: Male veiled chameleons have a casque, or shark-fin-like shield, ranging from 3 to 4 inches long on their heads. Females have a much smaller casque. (Photo by Keevin Minami, HDOA)

to import, breed, keep as pets, sell, release, or export veiled chameleons. Penalties can include a fine of up to \$200,000 and a possible prison sentence. The Hawai'i Department of Agriculture has an amnesty program allowing a person to turn in an illegal animal without prosecution.

Veiled chameleons are one of the many invasive species that the Maui Invasive Species Committee is trying to control.

MISC is a public/private partnership working to protect Maui County from the most harmful invasive plants and animals that threaten our environment, economy, and quality of life. Getting landowner permission to work on private property and receiving location reports of invasive species are keys to our success.

MISC thanks the homeowners and residents who call us to report sightings or captures of veiled chameleons and give us permission to search their properties. If we call to ask

permission to search your property for veiled chameleons, please say "yes."

We need your help. Get to know what's on your property.

If you see a veiled chameleon, capture it, contain it, and call 573-MISC (6472) or the Pest Hotline at 643-PEST (7378). If you don't want to capture it, call us as soon as possible.

If you are not sure it's a veiled chameleon, give us a call anyway. We'll come and get it from you.

Together we can keep Maui free from invasive plants and animals. Together we can keep Maui nō ka 'oi!

• Joylynn Paman, is the public relations and education specialist for the Maui Invasive Species Committee. "Kia'i Moku" or Guarding the Island, is prepared by the Maui Invasive Species Committee to provide information on protecting the island from invasive plants and animals that can threaten the island's environment, economy and quality of life.