



# A GUIDE TO BUYING CHAMELEONS

This guide is specifically designed for inexperienced and/or first-time buyer. Experienced or professional chameleon keepers can eliminate some of the problematic issues efficiently and not all advice works for them in full. Matters that experienced breeders can solve in different ways are marked as (EB).

## CHAMELEONS CAN BE OBTAINED FOR SEVERAL REASONS

### 1. PET KEEPING

### 2. PRIVATE BREEDING

### 3. PROFESSIONAL BREEDING

### 4. RESEARCH

As reasons 3 and 4 are very specific and are out of scope for the vast majority of readers and as specialists and scientists have to define their requirements and seek ways how to fulfill them, we will focus on the topics 1 and 2. But first, it is essential to know how the whole process should ideally look. Obtaining a chameleon is a very important step that not all pet owners fully understand. In the majority of cases, an animal suddenly lands in private hands and only then the owner starts to consider what to do with it, how to house it, feed it, care for it, etc. Information on the internet, which is nowadays a primary source of info, is unfortunately in many cases wrong or misleading and contradictory. Too often, after only few days or weeks, an unhappy owner with an ill and dehydrated chameleon ends up at some internet forum seeking help, which in many cases is not possible to provide. The chameleon ends up dying or long time suffering and the owner receives a shocking experience. The purpose of this text is to prevent this. The correct and responsible process of obtaining a chameleon looks as follows:



### 1. RESEARCH

- ◆ What species I would like to have?
- ◆ What is its common and its scientific name?
- ◆ Where does it come from?
- ◆ What natural conditions are typical for its home country?
- ◆ What are the experiences with this species in captivity?
- ◆ What cage size, orientation, and equipment is necessary?
- ◆ What is recommended for captive management?
- ◆ What are the failures and dangers?
- ◆ What are the relevant and reliable sources of information?

### 2. CAGE DESIGN

- ◆ How would I like to keep the chameleon?
- ◆ Will I keep it indoors, outdoors, or a combination?
- ◆ What equipment do I need?
- ◆ What size of cage can I afford?
- ◆ Where will I obtain it or how will I build it myself?

### 3. ITEMS TO BUY

- ◆ What do I need to buy/order and where?

### 4. CAGE FURNISHINGS

- ◆ What material, e.g. plants, vines, branches, etc. will I need and where will I get them?

### 5. CAGE MANUFACTURING

- ◆ A well-designed cage is to be completed, fully equipped and tested for several days ahead of receiving the chameleon for the cage's functionality.
- ◆ Feedback of an experienced breeder or forum is very wise to be obtained.
- ◆ Final fine tuning...

### 6. SOURCE OF CHAMELEON

- ◆ Where will I find my chameleon?
- ◆ At a reptile show?
- ◆ From a breeder?
- ◆ From a pet store?

### 7. CHAMELEON BUYING

- ◆ What size?
- ◆ What sex?
- ◆ What locale form/color morph?
- ◆ Will I take a wild caught or captive bred chameleon?
- ◆ How will I assess its health?
- ◆ How will I know its nutritional state?

### 8. CHAMELEON ACCLIMATION

- ◆ How will I adapt my chameleon to the cage?
- ◆ How will I know whether it is OK or not?
- ◆ What will I do if I face problems?
- ◆ Whom I will ask for advice/help?
- ◆ How will I find a competent veterinarian?

### 9. CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

- ◆ How will I care for my chameleon?
- ◆ We will focus here on the points 6 and 7 under number 3 buying chameleon as a pet. The main purpose many chameleon owners seek is joy from observing a unique creature that is thriving and enjoying a healthy, comfortable,



# BUYING CHAMELEON AS A PET AND / OR FOR PRIVATE BREEDING

## SOURCING YOUR CHAMELEON

- ◆ Buy your chameleon directly from a reputable breeder who is known for quality chameleons, can provide a guarantee, advice, and good customer service. (EB)
- ◆ Beware of buying over anonymous advertisements.
- ◆ Beware of buying from someone who is not ready to share details in advance and evidence about offered animals and their parents. (EB)
- ◆ If you buy at shows, do so only after proper assessment and look at the health of all offered animals, especially chameleons from the seller.
- ◆ Please buy from reputable stores only (guarantee, possibility of return, or place to shop for cage, equipment, food, supplements, etc.). (EB)
- ◆ Beware of buying from big chains pet stores or stores with bad reputation (you will pay more but will receive questionable value). (EB)

## WHAT AGE SHOULD YOU BUY?

- ◆ Buy a semi-adult specimen or young adult (4+ months) specimen. They are the easiest to adapt, no early development problems, and have a long life ahead. (EB)
- ◆ Beware of buying an egg to hatch (it is often a fraud, it is questionably ethical, it is very risky, and hatching is very unlikely).
- ◆ Beware of buying a juvenile (young chameleons have a hard time adapting, can have problems with health after transport, are more sensitive to changes and inexperienced care, and can easily die). (EB)
- ◆ Be cautious buying old specimens (this practice is very risky as the chameleon may be ill or parasite infested, may live only a short while, may have diseases). (EB)
- ◆ Consider adopting a rescue (but be ready for problems due to often inadequate care before).

## THE SEX OF YOUR CHAMELEON

- ◆ Consider buying a male (they live longer, are more active, often are more colorful, and have no egg laying complications). (EB)
- ◆ If you are considering purchasing a female, be prepared for more health risks, complications with egg laying). (EB)

## LOCAL AND COLOR MORPHS

- ◆ This is your free choice according to:
  - ◆ aesthetic preference,
  - ◆ availability, and
  - ◆ price.

## WILD CAUGHT OR CAPTIVE BRED

- ◆ Buy a captive bred specimen (they are less likely to have health problems, no or few parasites only, adapted to captivity).
- ◆ Consider buying a wild caught from outside its country of origin (e.g. Florida wild caught veiled, oustalet, or panthers) (they have no parasites, strong even if inbred animals).
- ◆ If you do buy wild caught animals from their country of origin, be prepared to deal with health problems and parasites as well as adaptation problems. (EB)

## HEALTH AND NUTRITION

- ◆ The chameleon's **APPEARANCE** must be healthy without visible wounds, injuries, swellings and traumas. The chameleon must not be fat with bulging casques and swollen extremities and joints.
- ◆ **EXTREMITIES** must be movable, straight, not broken or bent, with all digits and claws, joints slender, not swollen.
- ◆ **EYES** must be open, moveable and moving, a round and clean opening, turrets not sunken and not swollen.
- ◆ **SKIN** must be taut, not showing permanent wrinkles nor exposing bones deeply, well-shed or with only small white remnants of shed.
- ◆ **COLOR** must be naturally strong, not extremely light nor black nor showing black discolorations and scratches.
- ◆ **GRIP** must be strong to painful.
- ◆ **TAIL** must be prehensile and functional.
- ◆ **BREATHING** must be barely visible, not very evident.
- ◆ **BODY** must be either flattened or inflated but not showing ribs.
- ◆ **MOUTH** must be closed if not stressed; it can be open if the chameleon is upset at handling. The gingival (gum) mucous must be moist and of the same, homogeneous color without discolorations and cheesy pus around jaws.



# GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING SOLID BREEDER STOCK

1.

Look matters! Anything genetically weak should be considered, as color, body shape, and general vigor will be passed onto the offspring. Healed injuries are not an issue if they do not impede basic life functions. Missing horns, scars, nipped tails, missing fingernails, etc. are not genetic and these individuals can make excellent breeders.

2.

Health is key as the entire reproductive process takes a great deal of energy. Although appearance is important, it is the baseline health that is passed on to the offspring that will create a successful breeding project.

3.

Deformities can be present in pets only. These pets should not be bred. Your chameleon with a deformity can live a full and healthy life as a pet. But do not pass on the deformity. Deformities include (but are not limited to) crooked spines, bowed legs, unnatural body proportions, and strange shaped casques and scales. Deformities can also include aberrant colors and patterns or discolorations. Any of these can be a sign of an undesirable mutation or the effects of inbreeding.

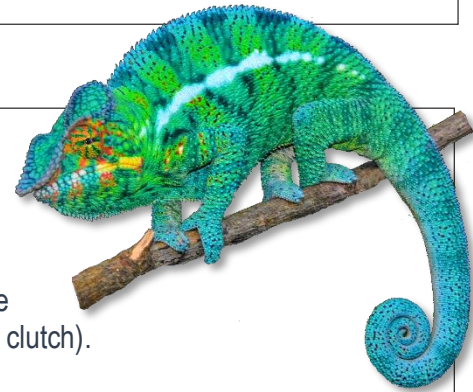
4.

Consider Captive Bred! Usually we think of wild caught chameleons for breeding projects. But if you are just starting out, you have enough to worry about without taking on deparasitization, acclimation, and sudden death due to stress on the internal organs from the importation process. If this is your first chameleon breeding then stack the odds in your favor and buy captive bred chameleons. It is the one way to most ensure you will enjoy this experience!

5.

Inbreeding. The best way to avoid inbreeding chameleons is to know what a healthy chameleon looks like and if the one you are considering looks otherwise then stay away. Common examples of inbreeding are:

- ◆ **VEILED CHAMELEONS** where the pair is selected from the same pet store at the same time (99% chance all the chameleons there are from the same clutch).
- ◆ **JACKSON'S CHAMELEONS FROM HAWAII** (the entire populations started with a maximum of 36 individuals 50 generations ago).
- ◆ **LINE BREEDING PROGRAMS** done for one trait while ignoring health and vigor. The tricky part of this is whether the breeder would admit their practices. The breeder you go with should be available for questions as to their methods.



MAKE A GOOD,  
RESPONSIBLE DECISION!

GOOD LUCK,  
WE WISH YOU GREAT JOY IN

OBTAINING AND KEEPING  
YOUR CHAMELEONS!

