



and ancient forests, with closed canopies. Like others in its genus, it hunts on large branches and dead, fallen tree trunks. Fernand's skin, *Lygosoma fernandi*, (Figure 669) is rarer. It is a large lizard which is about 35 cm long with short, robust legs.

670-671. *The flap-necked chameleon: a large adult at left, a juvenile at right.*

### Uniques legless lizards

by Olivier S.G. Pauwels

The Squamata are a group of reptiles that include the saurians (commonly called lizards), the ophidians (or snakes) and the amphisbenians. These latter, which are little known, are vermiforms (hence their other name of worm-lizards) and often lack legs. Among the four known endemic species of Squamata in Gabon, three are limited to the low altitude coastal forests, in a zone that is located between the Estuary province, Lambaréné and Rabi. They share common traits of being legless and adapted for burrowing. Two among them, *Cynisca bifrontalis* and *C. haughi*, are Amphisbaenidae. They do not strongly resemble one another; their size is much reduced and their ringed appearance and uniform pink color can cause them to be confused at first glance with earthworms, with which they cohabit. *Cynisca bifrontalis* was only known from one specimen described in 1906 and collected near Omboué, until the discovery in 2002 of five individuals in the oilfields of Rabi (Figure 672, enclosed). *Cynisca haughi*, described in 1904, is still known from only one specimen, found 50 km southwest of Lambaréné. The third species that is endemic to the coastal area of Gabon, *Feylinia boulengeri*, is a small, black Scincidae, of which only two individuals have been found to date, one beside the Mbilagone River that empties into the Komo Estuary, the other at Ngomo on the lower Ogooué. Gabon harbours a fourth amphisbenid, *Monopeltis galeata*, known only in the coastal area of Gabon and the Isle of Corisco in Equatorial Guinea. This concentration of endemic species in the Gabonese coastal zone is difficult to justify from a zoogeographic point of view and may simply be due to the fact that this portion of Gabon has benefited from more intense collection efforts by explorers and biologists. The very small number of known individuals for each of these species is more likely to be due to their subterranean mores and the difficulty of finding them than to the fact that they really are rare. The series of *Cynisca* at Rabi was collected following terracing work in the forest and such occasions in other regions of the country might present a plentiful harvest of more new species in the future.

