

WANTED

Gecko sightings in alpine areas!



Photographs: T. Jewell/Kathmandu

Kathmandu retail chain has generously sponsored the Department of Conservation to run a survey programme for endangered alpine geckos. We need your help to target our searches to the places where we are most likely to find geckos. We're very keen to learn of any sightings of any geckos in the alpine zone of South Island mountains – the area above the tree and shrub zones.

The geckos we're particularly interested in have only very recently been discovered. They are relatives of the Forest Gecko. Whereas Forest Geckos live in trees and shrubs and are quite common in the west and north of the South Island (and in the North Island), these newly discovered geckos occupy a very different habitat – alpine rock bluffs, boulder piles and scree above 1000m. They seem to be extremely rare. They are very variable in colour and pattern, from drab brownish grey to bold herringbone and chevron patterns, to the whole animal being virtually covered in blotches of orange and yellow. All have bright orange colouring inside the mouth, which distinguishes them from the more common varieties of gecko. The above photographs show some examples of these alpine geckos.

There are two kinds of lizard in New Zealand – geckos and skinks. Geckos (see above photographs) have broad heads with large bulging eyes, definite necks, and soft, velvety-looking skin which is covered in very small, granular scales. Skinks are more slender with narrow heads and small eyes, a narrow neck which is nearly as wide as the head, and have smooth, shiny, fish-like scales on the surface of the skin.

We would like to receive details of any unusual sightings of geckos from the mountains. If you've seen a gecko in the alpine zone recently or in the distant past, we're keen to know as much as possible of the following information about it:

- When you made your observation
- Details of the location where you found it – both a place name, description of where it was, the altitude, and a map grid reference if possible
- As much detail as you can remember of what the site was like – aspect, amount of rock, type and amount of vegetation
- How you found the gecko, and what it was doing at the time
- What length was it?
- What colour was it?
- A photograph of the gecko, and the area where you found it, if you took one

Please send this information to:
Mandy Tocher
Department of Conservation
c/- Private Bag 1930, Dunedin.
Email: MTocher@doc.govt.nz

