

Chevron skink

What are chevron skink?

The chevron skink is one of New Zealand's rarest lizards. It is listed by DOC as 'nationally endangered'. Less than 250 sightings have been reported since it was first described in 1906 and because of this, very little is known about where it lives or its way of life. Chevron skink belong to the genus *Oligosoma* (formerly *Leiolopisma*) members of which are only found in New Zealand. Their scientific name is *Oligosoma bomalonotum*. The species name "*bomalonotum*" means smooth backed. The very distinctive v shaped markings on the back of the chevron skink give it its common name.

Lost for over 60 years

First scientifically described in 1906 the chevron skink was only reported twice more until the 1970s. It had essentially been "lost" for over 60 years. This was partly due to a mix up of museum labels that gave its locality as Flat Island in the Mokohinau Islands group. The label should have read Great Barrier Island.



Adult chevron skink Photo: Robin Bush

Until the early 1990s the chevron skink was thought to survive only on Great Barrier Island. Then in 1991 a single sub-adult chevron skink was discovered on the neighbouring Little Barrier Island. Despite intensive surveys since then, no other chevron skink have been found on the island. On Great Barrier Island they have now been recorded in over 20 locations. Historical records suggest that they may have occurred on the mainland in the past.

Fight for survival

One of the reasons why the chevron skink has survived on Great and Little Barrier Islands is due to these islands being free of certain introduced predators such as stoats, weasels, ferrets (mustelids) and Norway rats. Should one or more of these problem animals become established on these islands it would have disastrous consequences for the chevron skink. For example the Norway rat would be a particular threat to the skink as it prefers to live along water courses and in wet places. These are the same kinds of places where chevron skink have been found. Like all other rodents in New Zealand, Norway rats are known to eat lizards. If the Norway rat managed to colonise on Great or Little Barrier Islands the chevron skink would face a great threat of extinction.



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Chevron skink facts

- They are New Zealand's longest lizard, measuring up to 30 cm from the nose to the tip of the tail.
- Dark bands extend down the face of the chevron skink from below the eye to just under the lower lip. Between these two bands is a distinctive pale coloured "teardrop" shape.
- Chevron skinks are capable of making noises and will often grunt or squeak on being disturbed.
- Female chevron skinks give birth to live young in mid to late summer, and can have up to 8 at once. It is not known if chevron skinks breed every year.
- Most sightings of chevron skinks have been in close proximity to streams or other damp places. This is due to their susceptibility to dehydration.

Research

Between 1997 and 2002 an intensive research project was carried out on Great Barrier Island looking at chevron skink habitat requirements. This study identified stream sides and damp areas as being the most likely place to find chevron skinks. However, reliably finding the skinks still remains a problem due to their secretive behaviour and excellent camouflage. Using the knowledge gained from the habitat research, the Department of Conservation is now focusing on developing new and improved techniques for detecting chevron skinks in ideal habitat.

A small captive population of chevron skink is currently held at the Auckland Zoo. Information on behaviour and biology obtained from these animals will be combined with the results of the research programmes on wild populations to enable the Department to better manage chevron skink in the wild.

How you can help

Any and all sightings of chevron skinks are important. They help to contribute to our knowledge of this rare lizard. If you think you see a chevron skink when on the island, please report it to the local Department of Conservation office ph 09 429 0044.

Several chevron skinks are caught each year by domestic and feral cats. Sometimes these skinks can be saved if they are found in time and given the right treatment. If you find an injured chevron skink please contact the Department of Conservation immediately on the above number. Successfully rehabilitated chevron skinks are released on Great Barrier Island at 'safe' sites where predator control is being conducted.

Do not bring any unwanted pests to Great or Little Barrier Islands. A permit from the Department of Conservation is required to land on Little Barrier Island, but remember ship rats and Norway rats are capable of swimming several hundred metres, so even boats moored near the island could accidentally introduce these pests. Keep rodent bait stations on your boat to minimise this risk.

If arriving at Great Barrier Island by boat, or if bringing freight, containers or buildings to the island, please check for stowaways such as possums, rats and mustelids. If you see any of these unwanted pests on the island, contact the Department of Conservation immediately.

Chevron Skink T shirts can be obtained from retailers on Great Barrier Island.