



Common gecko

Lizards in gardens in the lower North Island

WELLINGTON LIZARDS

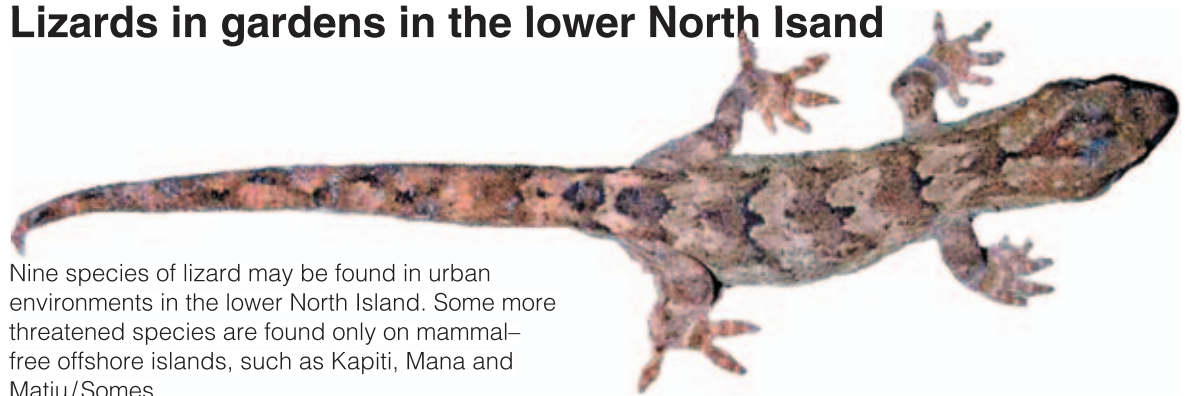
- Brown skink
- Common skink
- Copper skink
- Ornate skink
- Spotted skink

Common gecko

“Marlborough mini” gecko

Southern North Island forest gecko

Wellington green gecko



Nine species of lizard may be found in urban environments in the lower North Island. Some more threatened species are found only on mammal-free offshore islands, such as Kapiti, Mana and Matiu/Somes.

Common geckos are not threatened but some mainland populations are declining because of predation by introduced mammals, especially rats. Populations are increasing and abundant on many offshore islands.

Recognition

Geckos are very distinct from skinks. Geckos have a narrow neck and relatively broad head, large feet and velvety scales. Skinks, in contrast, appear to lack a neck, have smaller limbs and a more snake-like smooth body and scaling.





This fact sheet should be used with the fact sheets *Lizards in gardens* and *Gardening for lizards* to help you create a garden to provide habitat and food suitable for the lizards in your area.

Visit our website www.doc.govt.nz and search for “lizards”.



Common gecko (left) and common skink.

The common gecko may be confused with the forest gecko but the mouth colour and toes differ:

	COMMON GECKO	FOREST GECKO
INSIDE MOUTH	 Pink	 Orange
TOES	 Relatively short; broad pads	 Long and slender

Photos:
Andrew Morrison,
Colin Broderick.



The body patterning of common geckos can vary markedly from uniform grey, to striped or with dark and light patches.



Variation in body patterns of common geckos. Photos: Andrew Morrison (left, centre), Rod Morris (right).

Habitat preferences and behaviour

Common geckos are often found in creviced rock outcrops of coastal scarps, bluffs and rock tumbles, including associated scrubby vegetation. Common geckos can be found among dead wood and boulder banks, especially when covered with dense vegetation such as pohuehue. They inhabit forests and find homes beneath loose bark, in deep hollows or cliffs or in crevices in standing dead trees.

Common geckos are primarily nocturnal (meaning they are awake at night), but can occasionally be seen during the day when they bask at entrances to retreats (the places where they hide). During the day they will hide in favoured cover. Although common geckos are very capable climbers, they are more often found sheltering near the ground.

Common geckos have been recorded to live up to forty years, reaching sexual maturity at 4 years. They have a low reproductive rate, often producing only 1 or 2 live young per year, and so can be very slow to recover from the impacts of predators.

Recent research has shown that some geckos are able to avoid predation by rats by using different habitats, demonstrating an ability to detect the risk of predators.

Gardening tips

During their life common geckos may travel only very short distances and, so long as your garden provides good, safe habitat, they may be seen in the same parts of your garden for decades.

Common geckos are important seed dispersers for many native seeds. Plant an abundance of species which bear fruit and nectar, particularly *Coprosma propinqua* and pohuehue (*Muehlenbeckia complexa*). Other species whose fruit they eat include *Melicytus crassifolius*, *Leucopogon fraseri*, and *Rubus* species. Its likely they will eat the fruit of other divaricating shrubs which will also provide protection from predators.

In your garden, create features that resemble the natural habitats of common geckos by piling large rocks together, laying out large logs or by leaving dead trees standing. Imitate loose bark by carefully tying bark or moss around the trees. Encourage climbers up other vegetation, such as *Clematis paniculata*, *Clematis forsteri* or *Metrosideros carminea*. If you have banks or cliffs, plant shrubs around these to allow greater access to the high habitats, to connect areas of your garden and provide vegetated corridors.



Above, from top:
Fruit of *Coprosma propinqua*,
Muehlenbeckia complexa, and *Rubus squarrosus*.

Right: Rock gardens with plenty of cover and thick leaf litter or bark on the ground provide good habitat for common geckos. Photos: Jeremy Rolfe.

