



Common skink

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

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”.

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.

Recognition

Common skinks are often abundant in coastal locations where they are often a dark or black colour. In other places they are brown with irregular stripes. They can be distinguished from the similar brown skink by their straw coloured iris (brown skinks have a brown iris). Common skinks are not threatened.



Habitat preferences and behaviour

Common skinks reach sexual maturity when they are about four years old, and have on average 5-6 young each year. Individuals that have a larger body size (length) tend to have more young than smaller bodied individuals. Females are slightly larger than males. The most common food of common skinks is invertebrates, namely beetles, spiders, and the caterpillars of moths and butterflies. They also eat a small amount of seeds and fruit.

All lizards are cold blooded animals. This means that, unlike in mammals, lizards absorb heat from the environment rather than generate it internally. Many lizards bask in the sun to get warm, and if they aren't warm enough they have difficulty moving. The body temperature that a lizard can achieve has a profound effect on important life-traits: low temperatures can lengthen pregnancy, and can even result in the unborn baby's (neonate's) death.

Common skinks are avid baskers. They seek sun and prefer sunny habitats. They often minimise the risk of predation by exposing only small parts of their body at one time, still remaining well hidden. Common skinks love sunny rock piles and tumblers that have plenty of crevices. Not only are they great for basking in safe spots, but rock retains heat to keep them warm during cold spells.

Common skinks prefer grasslands (especially tall grass species or rank grass), scrublands and vinelands rather than forests. They love dry, open areas with lots of places to bask and lots of cover to hide under.



Common skink.
Photo: Colin Ogle.



Gardening tips

In your garden create rock piles, stacks of logs or untreated wood, old bricks, branch trimmings and layers of low-growing scrubby plants. Allow grass in out-of-the-way places to become long rather than mowing. The species is often found in tussocklands so they'll love gardens full of tussocks, grasses such as any of the snow tussock (*Chionochloa*), miniature toetoe (*Chionochloa flavicans*), or silver tussock (*Poa cita*). Common skinks are known to eat fruit of many species including pōhuehue (*Muehlenbeckia complexa*), *Melicytus crassifolius*, *Nertera depressa*, and *Coprosma* species.



Fruits of native plants that are eaten by common skinks. From left: pōhuehue, *Nertera depressa*, *Coprosma acerosa*.

Because common skinks will be out basking, provide plenty of cover to protect them from cats. Place logs, planks or bits of corrugated iron in out of the way places where plants can grow around or over them, these will provide cover and safe areas for skinks. To provide further protection use a multitude of divaricating, densely branched or spiny plants such as shrubby tororaro (*Muehlenbeckia astonii*), speargrass (*Aciphylla squarrosa*) and matagouri (*Discaria toumatou*) to ensure they have plenty of protection from predators.



Rock gardens with tussocks and divaricating or spiny shrubs, or rock piles make good habitat for common skinks. Photos: Jeremy Rolfe.