

What are plague skinks?

- Plague skinks (*Lampropholis delicata* – previously known as Rainbow skinks) are a small lizard 3–4 cm from nose to hind legs.
- They are brown or grey-brown, and often have a dark brown stripe along each side of their bodies with an iridescent metallic sheen in bright light.



The small, invasive plague skink

- Originally from Australia, they are now invasive in Hawaii and New Zealand.
- As the natural range of plague skinks includes the temperate climate of Tasmania they are well equipped to survive and spread throughout New Zealand and its offshore islands. Climate modelling suggests they would easily be able to establish in the South Island so their risk is substantial.

Rainbow skinks are Unwanted Organisms under the Biosecurity Act 1993. It is illegal to knowingly move, spread, release, breed, display or sell rainbow skinks without permission from MPI Biosecurity New Zealand.

How do I stop their spread?

- Check potted plants for any of the small white eggs, especially if plants are to be used in restoration projects, such as on off-shore islands or key ecosystems on the mainland. Ideally roots should be soil free for transport.
- Offshore islands of the Hauraki Gulf provide sanctuaries for our unique native species. Prevention is the best method of reducing the spread of pests to the islands:
 - Check for stowaways hitchhiking in your gear – on vessels, in kayaks, gear or luggage
 - Check any goods or freight that is to be relocated - plague skinks will frequently enter freight and shipping containers.
- Education: If you live in an area that has plague skinks tell your neighbours and friends of the presence, threats and impacts of plague skinks.
- If you see one outside of its known range, or suspect people of trading them as pets, call the 24 hour DOC hotline 0800 DOC HOT (0800 362 468) or MPI Biosecurity 0800 809 966 immediately. If possible, take a photo to help with obtaining the correct identification.

Find out more:

Phone 09 301 0101, visit www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz or www.treasureislands.co.nz



Plague skink Pest species



Why are they a threat?

- Plague skinks are invasive pests that pose a threat to our rare native lizards:
 - They breed rapidly. Plague skinks lay up to eight eggs three times per year and mature in less than half the time of native lizards. You may find communal nests of twenty to several hundred or even up to a thousand small white eggs, eight to ten mm long, oval in shape, with a leathery shell.
 - They reach high population densities faster than native lizards. This puts pressure on existing threatened native skink populations, causing competition for food and habitat.



Eggs of plague skinks are small, white and oval shaped

- Plague skinks are also a threat to other native plants and animals because they are omnivores – they eat crickets, snails, worms, beetles, flowers, small fruits spiders and even other small lizards. Because of this they could significantly affect our native ecosystems.

Where are they found?



Map showing the distribution of plague skinks around New Zealand. Source: Department of Conservation (2011)

- Plague skinks are commonly found under vegetation, leaf litter, rocks and logs both in moist and dry environments. Soil in potted plants is a favoured breeding habitat.
- They thrive in urban areas, home gardens and commercial areas including: builder supply yards; landscape supply yards; nurseries and garden centres that supply bark, soils, plants and potting mixes; industrial sites; quarries that supply aggregates, pavers, timber, pipes and waste ground.

How can I identify them?

- The quickest way to differentiate between the similar looking native copper skink and plague skink is the colour of the underside. Plague skinks are a distinct pale silver/grey whilst copper skinks are light brown in colour.
- Plague skinks have a single large diamond shaped scale on the top of their heads while New Zealand native skinks have two smaller scales



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Note the diamond shaped scale on the top of the head

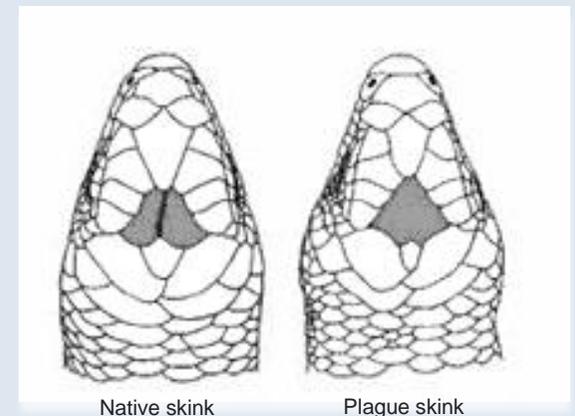


Diagram to show the different scale patterns on the head