



Wellington green 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.

The Wellington green gecko is threatened and is classified as being in Gradual Decline.

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".



The inside of the green gecko's mouth is vivid blue. Photos: Andrew Morrison.

Recognition

Wellington green geckos are green with pale green white or yellow spots along their backs and they can get quite large. The inside of the mouth is vivid blue, in contrast to common geckos and forest geckos which have pink and orange mouths respectively.

Green geckos are arguably New Zealand's most stunningly beautiful lizards, but unfortunately are rarely seen because of their effective camouflage and because of their declining populations;

Habitat preferences and behaviour

Green geckos are aboreal and enjoy scrub and forests, especially kanuka and manuka forests. They hunt during the night (i.e., are nocturnal) for flies and moths. Their hunting strategy is to sit and wait for prey to pass-by and because of this they are often seen in the same location night after night. Green geckos also like to bask in the sun and are often out in the early morning or late afternoon, especially after cool weather. Green geckos can be aggressive and bare their open blue mouth as a defense mechanism, and they can bark if provoked or startled.

Hang on!



Green geckos spend lots of time climbing in the canopy of forests. They do this with thousands of hair-like structures, known as setae, on their toe pads. The large surface area of setae allow the animals to take advantage of molecular-level attraction, called van der Waals forces, to stick to virtually any surface. Setae likely evolved to give geckos traction on rugged surfaces, since only a small area of each toe pad may be able to maintain grip. The tread of a car tyre follows a similar principle. Their tail is also very flexible and can act as a fifth limb gripping to surfaces.



Gardening tips

Create layers of vegetation in your garden to allow geckos to move from the tops of the canopy to lower levels where you have a greater chance of seeing them. Plant divaricating or spiny shrubs such as *Muehlenbeckia astonii*, speargrass and matagouri to ensure they have plenty of protection from predators. Aim to have small plant groves where bush patches receive plenty of sunlight for basking, but connect these groves to allow the animals to move safely between them. Layer or mulch the ground. Keep your expectations for seeing green geckos low. Green geckos, despite their beautiful bright colour, are very cryptic (well camouflaged), and people seldom find animals, even in very dense populations.

