

# SKINKS & GECKOS

by David Gregorie

Only two of the world's 22 families of lizards live in New Zealand — geckos and skinks.

Lizards are not very easy to find because many of them are coloured to match their background, but if you do find one it is easy to tell whether it is a skink or a gecko.

Geckos have quite soft loose-looking skins and are often brightly coloured. They can be yellow, bright green, brown with "carpet patterns" on their bodies, or dark green with light-coloured diamond-shaped markings.

They have wide heads, wide mouths and eyes that stick out rather like those of a frog. Their necks are narrow and their bodies much wider so that they look almost fat. Their feet are shaped like human hands and they can grip branches and twigs with them just as a monkey does. They can use their tails to hang on with too. They live in shrubs and small trees and hunt for insects to eat, usually at night. And that's another reason why they are hard to find.

Skinks are long, slim and shiny like polished leather. They don't have the bright colours of the geckos and they are quite different in shape. They have small heads

and very streamlined bodies that can slip easily through grass, tussock and herbs. They live on the ground. Their legs are small and they like to tuck them up by their sides while they lie in the sun.

Lizards are reptiles. They do not have fur or feathers to keep them warm and they cannot regulate their temperature in the way that birds and mammals do. Their body temperature goes up and down with the weather instead of staying at a steady 37 °C as ours does.

Most reptiles lay eggs. Turtles and crocodiles, snakes and tuataras lay eggs. All the world's geckos lay eggs too — except those that are found only in New Zealand. New Zealand geckos have live babies.

A friend of mine once had a pair of green tree geckos in his classroom terrarium. One day we watched while the female lizard had a baby. Suddenly she lifted one back leg off the ground and shook herself. Out popped a tiny baby lizard. It ran away and hid under some bark and we could not find it again before I went home.

Skinks have live babies too.

A common skink scuttles across the forest floor.

