

Lizards don't feed their babies on milk as a cat or a sheep does, nor do they catch insects for them as birds do for their babies. As soon as they are born baby lizards must catch insects for themselves or they will starve. And it is much safer for them to keep away from their mother and father too, just in case their parents eat them by mistake.

A lizard's skin does not stretch to fit when it grows in the way that ours does. Instead it peels off like sunburn when it gets too tight for the growing body and a new skin grows underneath. This happens every four to eight weeks during the spring and summer.

Towards the end of autumn and in the early winter, skinks and geckos crawl under stones or pieces of bark or into holes and sleep through the cold weather. This is because there is not enough warmth in the air to keep their blood at working temperature and there are not enough insects around for them to eat.

Lizards have an odd way of defending themselves if they are attacked. They can break off a part of their tails and leave it

wriggling around to confuse the enemy while they escape. In time a new tail will grow but it never grows as long as the old one.

Geckos and skinks are both quite easy to keep as pets. They need a terrarium built out in the open with soil, rocks, pieces of bark and a small shrub for those that like to climb. They will eat only live food and must be given flies, moths, caterpillars, grubs and other insects. They also like a dish of honey water.

There is no need to be frightened of New Zealand lizards. They are quite harmless. They don't feel cold or slimy or creepy or in any way nasty to handle. But you do have to be careful. You might scare them into shedding their tails if you are clumsy.

Lizards are among the prettiest pets you could have.

A book to read:

The Tuatara, Lizards and Frogs of New Zealand

Richard Sharell, Collins.

An elegant green tree gecko hunts for food.
Photographs N.Z. Wildlife Service

