

Welcome to the new section of the magazine for our younger readers. The new name was chosen as we hope *Tracks* will lead you into all sorts of interesting nature adventures. Future issues will include stories, pictures, puzzles, competitions and fascinating facts which will help you understand more about the natural world around us. We hope all you "Trackers" will get out and about and do things which will help protect and conserve all our native plants and animals.

As these are your pages, we welcome any contributions or suggestions on what could be in future issues of *Tracks*. Please write to *Tracks*, Box 7115, Whangarei with your ideas.

Editor,

Terry Hutchinson

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE CALLED BEAKHEAD?

Sounds like a nick-name doesn't it? In fact it is the translation of *Rhynchocephalia* — the scientific name for reptiles with upper jaws overhanging their lower ones. Beak-head giants like the dinosaur roamed the earth over 200 million years ago. One of the smallest of the beak-heads, our native tuatara, is the only survivor of these ancient creatures.

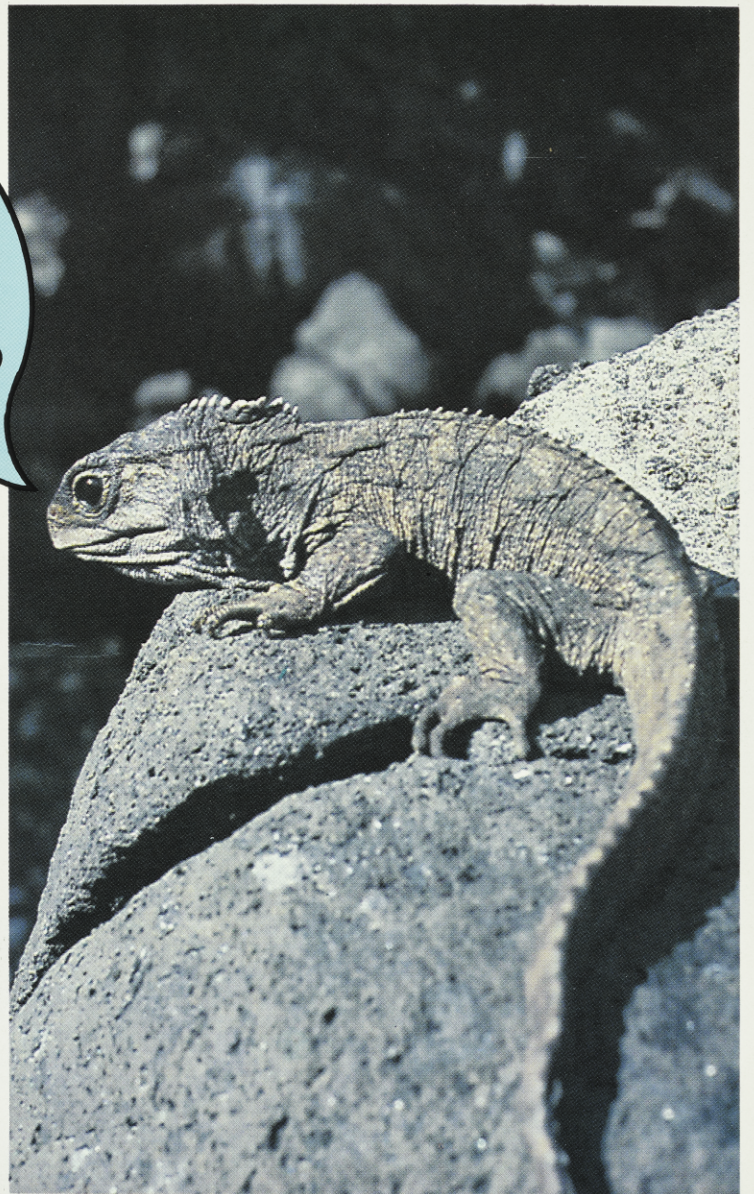
Young tuatara have another sort of beak — a horn on the tip of their nose which they use for breaking out of their eggs. This egg-breaker falls off a few days after hatching. The eggs are laid underground and incubate for 12 to 15 months. Our spiny-backed tuatara often share the burrows of nesting sea-birds in the cliffs of islands around New Zealand.

Tuatara disappeared from the two main islands of New Zealand around the turn of the century. A major threat to their survival is the Norway rat which eats their eggs and we must keep rats off those islands where tuatara still survive. The tuatara's biggest enemies are other varieties of rat — the two legged types — those poachers and smugglers who steal tuatara to sell on the international black market for illegal private collections. This is despite a law which gives them absolute protection.

Like many lizards, the tuatara can shed its tail as a means of escape from enemies. The tail regrows but is usually shorter and is a different colour and pattern from the original.

A fully grown tuatara weighs about 1 kilogram and is about 60 centimetres long. They may live for up to 100 years.

Tuatara also have a fascinating "third eye" on the top of their heads. Unfortunately it is covered by thick scales early in its growth. Although this "eye" cannot see through the scales it has all the needed features for vision. Perhaps an even more fitting nickname for the tuatara should be "Old third eye"? But rather than dreaming up other nicknames for this unique creature, we should take every possible step to ensure tuatara survive for evermore.



What can you do to help?

- You can learn more about them and tell those around you how important it is to protect them.
- You could write to the Wildlife Service and ask them for further information on tuatara (Address: N.Z. Wildlife Service, Department of Internal Affairs, Private Bag, Wellington.).
- You could ask your teacher at school to allow you to do a project on tuatara. 🦎