

## – The possible roles of lizards in plant reproduction



Above: Pacific geckos congregate on newly opened pohutukawa flowers to feed on nectar. As many as five geckos have been seen crowded on to a single inflorescence and geckos preferentially seek out trees in bloom.

Photo: Tony Whitaker



geckos appear to be pohutukawa, ngaio and flax. The geckos emerge from their hiding places at dusk and quickly gather in trees or flax plants that are in bloom, often travelling considerable distances to do so. They forage through the foliage seeking blossoms that have recently opened as these seem to produce the greatest amount of nectar. The geckos lap the nectar from each flower in turn in an inflorescence and then move on in search of further flowers.

The density of geckos in plants with flowers at the right stage for pollination can be very high. As many as five geckos have been observed crowded on to one pohutukawa inflorescence and overall densities in flowering pohutukawas have been calculated at 5-8 per square metre of canopy surface. At one site every flax flower spike had geckos on it, most with four to six!

When feeding from pohutukawa flowers geckos scramble over the brush-like inflorescences and push their heads down be-

tween the stigmas and stamens to get at the nectar. In doing so their heads, and in particular their throats, become covered in pollen. Because of the way they feed, the throat is the best part of the body for transferring

**Middle:** Competition amongst lizards for fruit is so fierce in some places that ripe berries are plucked straight from the plant. Here a normally terrestrial shore skink has climbed a metre and a half up the smooth, vertical stems of kawakawa to reach ripe fruit. Any fruit that were dislodged were rapidly snatched up by other skinks and frequent fights developed for choice morsels.

Photo: Tony Whitaker

**Right:** Geckos which feed on nectar commonly accumulate large amounts of pollen on their throats – here yellow pohutukawa pollen on a giant gecko's throat at least 12 hours after it last had access to pohutukawa flowers.

Photo: Tony Whitaker

