

# NEW ZEALAND LIZARDS

The neglected animals

by Robert Porter

**V**irtually ignored by scientists until the last two decades, New Zealand's lizards only received the security of legal protection in 1981, although their large cousin the tuatara has been protected since the end of last century.

Our small lizards are no less unique than the tuatara, all of them occurring only in this country. Unfortunately several species are now dangerously rare.

## Inconspicuous nature

These reptiles have no doubt been somewhat overlooked because of their inconspicuous nature, especially if compared with

New Zealand's birds. Yet the lizard fauna is no less exceptional and not much smaller in number. To date almost 40 species of gecko and skink have been named (though there is still some disagreement over some of these) and this is likely to increase further in the near future. Research on the common skink (*Leiopisma nigriplantare maccani*), found in the South Island and southern North Island, has shown that there are five or possibly more distinct species currently combined under one name. Preliminary results also indicate the common gecko (*Hoplodactylus maculatus*) may also be a group of several species.



The harlequin gecko (*Hoplodactylus rakiurae*), a strikingly marked inhabitant of the Southern Tin Ranges on Stewart Island, was only discovered in the early 1980s. Photo: B.W. Thomas



The yellow colour form of the Auckland green gecko is found in the wild only rarely, possibly because the bright colouration makes it more conspicuous amongst green foliage. Photo: Robert Porter