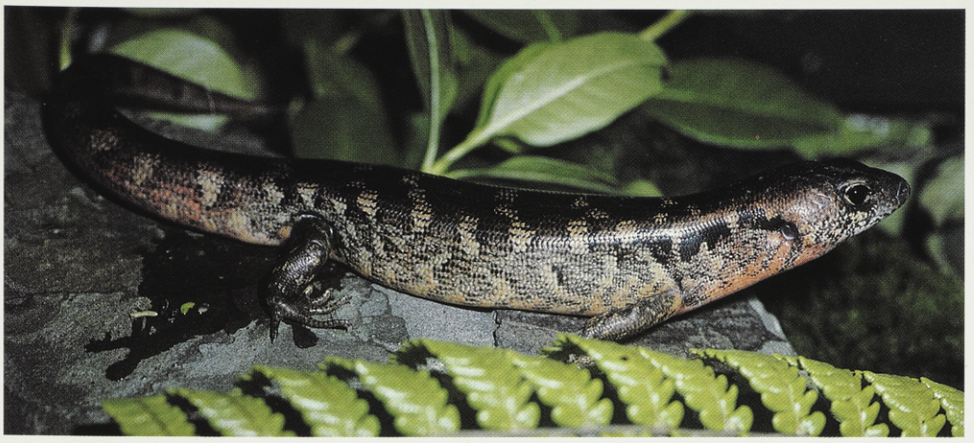

Top: *The Great Barrier skink (*Leiolopisma homalonotum*), a 300mm lizard only found on Great Barrier Island where it is usually associated with forest streams, is one rare species which is being maintained in captivity to learn more about its habits and requirements.* Photo: Robert Porter

Top right: *The localised distribution in a populated area of the Taranaki goldstripe gecko (*Hoplodactylus chrysosireticus*) has meant it is a regular victim of land development. Luckily the species adapts well to captivity and breeds readily.* Photo: Robert Porter

Right: *A very distinctive nocturnal lizard, the robust skink (*Cyclodina alani*) has a limited distribution on a handful of islands scattered around northern New Zealand making it highly vulnerable to the spread of rats by visiting boats.* Photo: Robert Porter

of the animal. More emphasis has now been placed on three captive groups, held on the island and in Auckland, to produce at least some of the information which is proving so difficult to collect from wild populations. To date two of these groups have successfully bred and accurate and methodical record taking will yield useful facts and figures.

Other rare species

Similar captive groups have been set up with other rare species. The distinctive robust skink (*Cyclodina alani*) has been recorded as breeding for the first time in captivity over the last two seasons and an effective programme has also been installed for the Giant Otago skink (*Leiolopisma otagense*), both under the care of NZHS members.

Heritage Park, as well as holding Whitaker's and Great Barrier skinks, is also trying to breed McGregor's skink (*Cyclodina macgregori*), while Rainbow and Fairy Springs in Rotorua is working with the grand skink (*Leiolopisma grande*). Several experienced NZHS members in Nelson, New Plymouth and Auckland are carrying out similar work with the geckos, including the harlequin gecko, black-eyed gecko (*Hoplodactylus kahutarae*) and the Taranaki goldstripe gecko (*H. chrysosireticus*). This, at least, will ensure the continued survival of these species in captivity and, with correctly organised breeding programmes, perhaps some of these species could be re-released into areas of the country that they have declined or disappeared from, providing the populations and habitats are managed precisely.

New Zealand herpetology, despite its late start, has never looked as healthy as right now. Through the cooperation of professional and amateur herpetologists, the future for several endangered (and some not so endangered) species, which a decade ago was rather fragile, now appears considerably more secure. The emergence of the new Society for Research on Amphibians and Reptiles in New Zealand is an indication that the science has reached a level of maturity in this country.

There is certainly a great deal of catching up required and for some species such as the striped skink and the Stephens Island goldstripe gecko (*Hoplodactylus stephensi*) it may already be too late. However, with the ever increasing pool of accumulated knowledge both from field and captive research, and the continued dedication of a small but increasing band of herpetologists, there may be a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel for all of New Zealand's unique and, most importantly, irreplaceable lizards.

Attempts by the Department of Conservation to strengthen the vulnerable position of Whitaker's skink have taken the innovative form of endeavouring to establish new populations on offshore islands. Photo: Robert Porter

Robert Porter is the secretary of the New Zealand Herpetological Society, and assistant natureworld supervisor, New Zealand Heritage Park, Auckland.