



STEPHENS ISLAND'S immensely rich reptile-seabird community has never been exposed to rats, and cats were eradicated within 30 years of their appearance (but not before causing the extinction of the endemic Stephens Island wren). Tuatara are the largest and most famous reptiles on the island, reaching numbers of up to 2,000 per hectare (equivalent to about 750 kg of tuatara biomass). They feed on beetles, wetas, worms, lizards and the eggs and chicks of fairy prions.

JUVENILE TUATARA are initially brown, unspotted, and much more cryptic than their parents. Their adult colours develop over the 13 or so years it takes them to reach sexual maturity. Recent studies have revealed the surprising discovery that most tuatara nesting takes place in the island's sheep pasture, suggesting that the warm soil temperatures there are attractive to nesting females. Nevertheless, the eggs still take a year or more to incubate. Why rush when you'll probably live another 70 years or more?

THE SPECKLED SKINK is one of four species of the genus *Leiopisma* (smooth shell) to be found on the island. With a total length of up to 240 mm, it is also the largest. Its specific name, *infrapunctatum* (spotted below), refers to the black spots on its spectacular yellow belly. Like tuatara, it thrives in the forest on Stephens Island and basks discreetly by day. Speckled skinks are not restricted to Stephens Island, being found also in the lower North Island and around Nelson.