



Pacific Gecko

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South Island are the day-active *Oligosoma* species that prefer drier, sunny sites. These may be glimpsed as they scurry for cover when disturbed.

Common geckos (species of the *Hoplodactylus maculatus* complex) sometimes occur in sheds or older houses, forming populations that live for many generations in the roof or beneath the floor. These nocturnal animals are seldom seen but tell-tale signs of their presence are their droppings — small white lumps of uric acid, or the papery, white pieces of skin shed several times each year.

In outer suburbs, gardens bordering native bush or scrub may be home to tree-dwelling green geckos (*Naultinus* species) and forest geckos *Hoplodactylus granulatus*, but their superb camouflage means they will rarely be seen.

To encourage lizards in the garden it is important to know their needs. To observe them requires patience and an understanding of their behaviour.

The essential things in a lizard's life are secure cover and food. Day-active skinks also require sheltered basking sites. Highly ordered and tidy suburban gardens are no place for lizards as these conditions are not met. However, if you have an overgrown garden, or 'wild' places on your property, there are things you can easily do to encourage lizards to establish themselves or to enhance the populations that might be present.

All lizards require a place to hide when inactive, and to protect them from predators and extreme weather. Cold, heat and dehydration are critical factors in their survival. Lizards also need cover to shelter them from predators while they search for food. The kinds of places lizards use for retreats, and when foraging, vary between species, however.

Natural retreats include cracks in the ground or banks, places beneath logs or rocks, dense vegetation (e.g. the bases of flax plants), crevices in trees, or under bark. Materials for artificial retreats for lizards are limited only by your imagination — consider using planks, corrugated iron, bricks, or concrete. Remember, it is not the material but the size of the sheltering object that is significant. The protective object should exceed 20 centimetres square and its distance from the ground should be no more than 5-8 millimetres). Lizards like to squeeze themselves into a tight space just wider than their body thickness to feel contact with both their back and belly. Anything too far from the

*The suburban rock-garden (at right) has many features of benefit to geckos and day-active skinks. Lots of loosely placed rocks provide secure crevices for retreats and good basking surfaces. Dense plant growth provides safe cover for foraging. Closely branched Coprosma species produce edible fruit. Shrubs reaching to the roof-line to allow geckos access to the roof void. The only problem is the cat but it would be challenged to catch lizards in such good cover.*

## What to look for, and where

The lizard species inhabiting suburban gardens vary widely throughout the country. The lists below are just a guide to what to expect in different places. Remember anything can turn up, especially in rural gardens, as happened recently when a Coromandel resident found a striped gecko *Hoplodactylus stephensi* in his bedroom — the first North Island record for this exceedingly rare and endangered species!

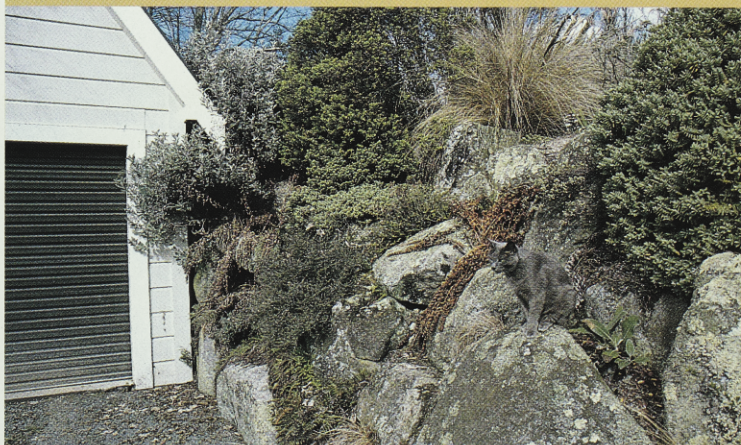
In Auckland: Though copper skinks *Cyclodina aenea* and ornate skinks *C. ornata* are widespread in the city, their secretive and largely nocturnal habits mean they are not often seen. Day-active rainbow skinks *Lampropholis delicata*, introduced from Australia, are much more conspicuous inhabitants. In outer suburbs (e.g. North Shore, Henderson, Titirangi), gardens adjacent to native forest or scrub remnants may also have green geckos *Naultinus elegans*, forest geckos *Hoplodactylus granulatus* and Pacific geckos *H. pacificus*.

Wellington: Copper skinks are prevalent but ornate skinks are very localised and rarely seen. The most widespread lizards in the city are the daytime common skinks *O. nigriplantare polychroma* and brown skinks *Oligosoma zelandicum*. Common geckos *Hoplodactylus maculatus* are relatively abundant in coastal suburbs (e.g. Island Bay, Miramar). In hill suburbs (e.g. Karori, Eastbourne, Hutt Valley), gullies with native forest or scrub are occupied by forest geckos and green geckos.

Christchurch: The only lizard within the city is the common skink. In suburbs along the Port Hills and at Lyttelton there are also Canterbury geckos (an undescribed species related to *Hoplodactylus maculatus*). Jewelled geckos *Naultinus gemmeus* occur in remnants of native forest or scrub.

Dunedin: The southern city fares least well for suburban lizard populations. Only common skinks live in urban areas but in outer hill suburbs, and in the small communities along the Otago Peninsula, jewelled geckos occur in native scrub and forest remnants, sometimes in exceptional abundance.

Other places, and surprises: Less commonly reported from city and town gardens are moko skink *Oligosoma moco* (North Shore), spotted skink *O. lineocellatum* (Kaikoura, Christchurch), McCann's skink *O. maccanni* (Alexandra), Marlborough green gecko *Naultinus manukanus* (Picton), Nelson green gecko *Naultinus stellatus* (Nelson), and two as yet undescribed species related to *Hoplodactylus maculatus* (Wellington, Kaikoura and Alexandra).



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