

# Skinks

## Digging deeper...

In contrast to skinks in warmer climates, which lay eggs, our skinks give birth to live young. Laying eggs would expose them to the elements with the mother having no control. By carrying the eggs and young around the mother can seek out the right conditions for her babies, giving them a better chance of surviving.

## Jargon hunter

### Snout-vent length

This is the standard way of measuring the length of lizards. This measurement runs from the tip of the nose (snout) to the anus (vent) and does not include the lizard's tail. The tail is not included because of its highly variable nature and the ability many lizards have to break off their tail and leave it behind as a defence mechanism.

## Local nuggets

Some of the best places to spot skinks are the cemeteries of Central Otago. Fallen tombstones provide great basking surfaces, while the cracks in the concrete provide convenient hideaways.

A keen eye is often required to spot these lizards despite some species being very common. You are most likely to spot them as they dart away from their rocky basking spots in the sun into crevices in the rocks.

Otago is home to at least nine different species of skink. Our skinks are day-active lizards that feed on invertebrates, such as insects and spiders, and fruits. Different species have adapted to occupy some of the different habitats available throughout Otago, such as the Common skink, which is mainly found in tussocky grasslands where its striped appearance offers the best camouflage.

The Grand and Otago skinks are at the centre of considerable conservation efforts. These two species grow up to 30cm long and only live in Otago. It is estimated there are only between 2,000 and 5,000 of each species left. Their known range only occupies around 8% of the land that is suitable.

Otago is also home to at least nine gecko species. The most well known of these is the Jewelled gecko, which is common on the Otago Peninsula. Some of Otago's geckos grow to be at least 40 years old and, like many New Zealand birds, breed very slowly. Common geckos in the Macraes area of Otago do not reach sexual maturity until 8-9 years of age and females are pregnant for 14 months!



An Otago skink basking on a schist outcrop



A McCann skink scurrying over a rock

