

pigment.

It is more difficult for these rare yellow animals to survive because their unusual colouring makes them more obvious to predators rather than camouflaging them. Geckos use their spoon shaped tongues to clean their eyes as they cannot blink. Their eyes are permanently covered by their eyelids, which are transparent and fused together, forming an ocular lens.

When geckos slough their skin, it is often possible to see the "eye scale" part of the old skin. This "eye scale" is the top layer of the ocular lens, which peeled off with the rest of the old skin.

The lifespan of a smaller species like the common gecko (with a total length of about 15cm) is between 15-20 years in the wild, while a Duvaucel's gecko was recorded as surviving 36 years in the wild. Duvaucel's geckos are the largest in the New Zealand reaching lengths of up to 32cm.

Male gecko can be identified by the bulge at the base of the tail on the underside. This contains the hemipenes, the copulatory organ.

# Did

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# you

# know?

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Lizards



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**All lizards shed their skins, because as they grow, their skin doesn't fit properly. This is called sloughing. Sometimes parts of their old skins can be seen in the places where lizards live, like old clothes they've left behind.**

Some lizards are diurnal, which means they come out in the day, and some are nocturnal, and come at night. Lizards rely on their environment for warmth, so basking in the sun is an important part of the day for many species. Sometimes lizards will “shuttle” in and out of the sunshine to keep from getting too hot or cold. This behaviour helps them to thermoregulate (control their body temperature).

Lizards live in all sorts of places. Many live trees and shrubs some live in the leaf litter on the forest floor, and some found on beaches – like the Sutters skink, which can dive and swim in seawater! Lizards often hide in dark places until it is time for them to come out and hunt.

Although they are quick to spot movement, lizards can't see very well.

Lizards have ears, just behind their eyes, and nostrils at the end of their nose and they will often hear of smell food before they are close enough to see it properly.

Lizards mainly eat insects, but also berries, seeds and they lick nectar from flowers with their long tongues.

Lizards are important for many plants, because they spread seeds by eating and carrying them to new places. When they lick nectar, lizards get pollen on their faces, and as they carry this pollen from flower to flower, lizards pollinate flowers.

Nearly all lizards are territorial, and get angry with strange lizards coming onto their “turf”. Lizards will try to scare others away by looking and sounding as fierce as possible.

They make themselves look bigger by raising their heads and bodies as high as they can, and some will open their brightly coloured mouths to seem more threatening. Some lizards have blue mouths and

tongues, some have pink or orange. Sometimes their mouths are a different colour from their tongues.

Nearly all lizards can make noises, but humans can't hear all the sounds they make. The sounds we can hear are chirps, squeaks, grunts and even barks!

Lizards may also use some of these noises to try and scare other lizards away from their territory. If neither lizard will back down, they may fight, and the winner will take over the territory. It is mostly males who fight.

New Zealand lizards give birth to live young. Some may have one or two babies, some can have six or eight.

Most lizards in other countries lay eggs. Only one native New Zealand lizard the Suter (or egg laying) skink lays eggs.

Lizards have enemies. Cats, rats, pigs, ferrets, stoats, kingfishers, weak, hawks and Morepork are all predators which will eat lizards if they can catch them.

Other animals such as possums, pigs, goats and deer harm lizards by destroying the places lizards live in eating the food lizards rely on to survive.

Lizards protect themselves from predators in many ways.

All lizards use camouflage. Their markings are similar to the places they live in, so that they blend in and are very hard to see. Some can make themselves darker of lighter to blend in even more.

Some lizards are fast and will run and hide if they hear something coming. Others will stay very still and hope they aren't notices.

If a lizard does get caught, it has one last chance to get away. Lizards can drop their tails!

When a lizard's tail breaks off, it wriggles to try and trick the predator into taking the wriggly tail, and leaving the lizard behind. If this trick works, the lizard grows a new tail. Losing a tail during the winter means a lizard may starve to death as the ‘fat’ keeps them alive during their hibernation period.

Some types of lizards are now very rare. They have been killed and their homes destroyed by introduced enemies and there are only a few safe places left for them. On islands without enemies you can find the forest teeming with lizards so it is very important that introduced pests are kept off these special places.

There are two groups of New Zealand geckos, the genus *Naultinus*, the “green tree geckos” which are all diurnal (day active) and arboreal (tree dwelling). The other genus, *Hoplodactylus*, contains nocturnal (night active) earthy coloured geckos. Many of our geckos are endemic that means they are only found in New Zealand.

Gecko feet are well adapted to gripping smooth surfaces. Tiny claws are at the tip of each toe and microscopic hair-like structures called lamellae on the pads of the foot greatly increase the amount of contact (and grip) with surfaces. This adaptation works so well that some species of geckos can walk up glass.

Geckos have rather loose fitting skin with granular scales that can be seen on close inspection. “Old” skins are usually shed almost whole during the sloughing. How often sloughing occurs depends on the geckos growth rate. At warm times of the year, a well fed gecko will “grow out of” its skin every six or so weeks, but may not slough at all during the colder months of winter.

Red mites the geckos' equivalent of fleas may be visible in the folds of a gecko's skin. Usually these parasites are just a nuisance, but a heavy infestation may contribute to the death of a weak animal.

Different species of geckos have different markings to camouflage themselves, according to their habitat. Individual geckos of the same species may also be quite different shades – forest geckos for example range from browns and greys to olivey greens. Green tree geckos may sometimes have yellow off-spring!

Normal green geckos have blue and yellow pigments (colours) in their skin, but yellow geckos lack the blue