

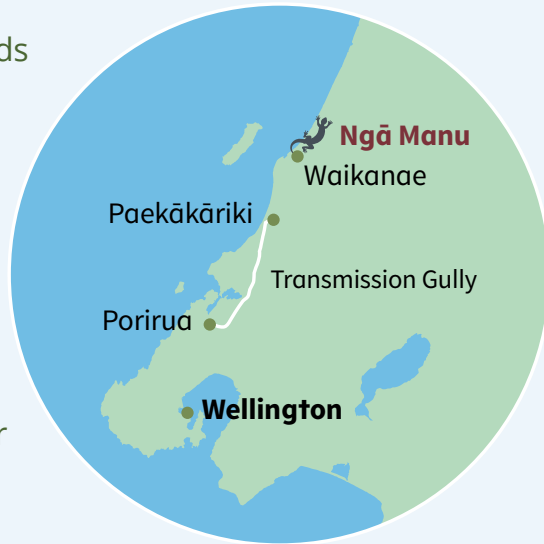


Saving the Lizards



by Iona McNaughton

In 2015, eighty native lizards were moved to Ngā Manu Nature Reserve because their homes were in the path of the new Transmission Gully motorway. The lizards stayed at Ngā Manu until new homes were made for them near the motorway.



Kaumātua from local iwi Ngāti Toa and Te Āti Awa ki Whakarongotai blessed the lizards' new home at Ngā Manu. The kaumātua are **kaitiaki** of the native lizards. They also blessed the lizards and their new rocky homes when they were taken there in 2018.

Ngā Manu

Ngā Manu Nature Reserve is on 14 hectares of land near Waikanae. The staff at the reserve take care of native forests and native birds and reptiles, including lizards. Many people visit Ngā Manu, including school students.

Capturing the lizards

Before they started building the motorway, workers **surveyed** the area. They wanted to find out what types of native **flora and fauna** lived there. They discovered that no native birds or bats were in danger from the motorway. But they did find that some native fish and lizards were threatened.

Workers captured the native fish and moved them to nearby streams. Then the native lizards were also collected from their natural **habitat** and taken to Ngā Manu.





Protecting the environment

“When we build new roads, we have to follow strict rules to protect the environment,” says Reuben Mills, who worked on the motorway project. It was important that the environment was left in better condition when the motorway was finished.

During the project, workers planted native trees and shrubs. They protected nearby streams and set traps to catch pests.



Many native trees and shrubs were planted.

Feeling at home

Most of the native lizards taken to Ngā Manu were skinks. There were only eight geckos. Before the lizards arrived, staff built cages to protect them from predators like rats and mice. They put ferns, branches, sticks, and bark in each cage to make the lizards feel at home.



The native lizards were captured in groups from different areas in the hills. They stayed in these groups in the cages at Ngā Manu. Because they knew each other, they were more likely to get along.

“Our job was to take care of the lizards and keep them healthy,” says Dave Banks from Ngā Manu. The lizards were fed insects, moths, and maggots.

Skinks and geckos

Skinks and geckos are both native lizards, but they are very different.

	Skink	Gecko
Scales	has hard, shiny scales	has soft scales
Eyes	can blink	can't blink
Sheds its skin (as it grows)	skin comes off in several pieces	skin comes off in one piece
Habitat	mostly lives on the ground	mostly lives in trees and bush
When in danger	dashes away	likes to stay still



Skink



Gecko

Measuring the lizards

The lizards were measured and weighed when they arrived at Ngā Manu. Their average length was between 8 and 11 centimetres. They were measured and weighed again before they were returned to their habitat. Each skink was given a tag so scientists could identify them when they checked up on their health.



Designing new homes

Ox Lennon, a student from Victoria University, designed rock piles for the lizards to live in when they returned to the hills. The rock piles protect them from predators. The gaps between the rocks are big enough for the lizards to slip through but are too small for rats and mice to get in.



The lizards' measurements were useful when Ox was designing the rock piles.

More lizard projects

Since the first group of native lizards were released in 2018, the staff at Ngā Manu have collected and taken care of two more groups. The third group is still at the nature reserve. “We’ve learnt a lot from the first project,” says Dave Banks. “We moved the cages to a sunnier place, and the lizards are thriving.”

Scientists have visited the rock piles many times. They discovered that other native lizards had also moved in and made themselves at home.

Everyone at Ngā Manu is pleased to have cages that are pestproof so they can continue to look after other reptiles when they need a safe home.

Glossary

flora and fauna: plants
and animals

habitat: a place where
an animal is suited to live

kaitiaki: someone who
protects the environment

kaumātua: elders

surveyed: examined and
recorded the features of
an area



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