

Shore Skink Survey, Tiritiri Matangi Island, 2 January to 8 January 2012



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Other team members: Jonathan Jepson (JJ), Alison Bray (AB), Roger Bray (RB), Morag Fordham (MF), Simon Fordham (SF).

Other helpers: Jan (JE) and Greg Ellis (GE), Nicola Brady (NB) and Jess Clark (JC) (NB and JC are Island rangers).

Survey Methods

The pitfall traps were installed/checked on 24th December 2011. All the 'C' line and B11 and B10 had been left in place from the 2010/11 survey. These traps were all in a satisfactory condition although two of the wooden 'overlids' were so rotten they had to be replaced.

The traps were emptied, baited and set on the afternoon of the 2nd January. The set up was completed by 4 pm.

The survey was carried out over seven days – one day for setting up the traps and six days of checking the traps and hand-searching. Checking and hand-searching were carried out between 8.00 am and 10.00 am each day. After Day 1, when the traps were set up for the first time, the routine was as follows:

- traps were opened and checked systematically moving south along the beach (from row 11 to row 1). Any shore skinks found in the traps were processed and released. Moko and copper skinks were identified and released without processing. After each trap was checked, it was left open.
- once all traps had been checked, two people moved systematically from row 11 to row 1, re-baiting and setting the traps. During this procedure, additional skinks were sometimes captured in the traps. Other team members carried out hand-searches under logs and seaweed.
- On Day 7 the traps were opened and checked as before. Then 18 of the 33 traps were removed and the holes filled in. The remaining 15 traps (all of the C row plus B5, B9, B10 and B11) were filled with rocks or sand, plastic lids firmly placed, wooden lids set over and weighed down with rocks, marked with orange tape, and left in a safe condition for next year's survey.

The 18 sets of buckets, lids and wooden covers have been stored in the implement shed. All the other equipment and paperwork have been taken off the Island by John and Kay.

Personnel

Team members present on each day were as follows:

Day 1, 2 Jan	Day 2, 3 Jan	Day 3, 4 Jan	Day 4, 5 Jan	Day 5, 6 Jan	Day 6, 7 Jan	Day 7, 8 Jan
KM, JS, JJ, AB, JE, GE	KM, JS, JJ, SF, RB	KM, JS, JJ, MF, AB, NB	KM, JS, JJ, MF, JC, SF	KM, JS, JJ, RB, AB	KM, JS, JJ, MF, SF	KM, JS, MF, SF, AB, RB

Results

Shore skinks

- Four skinks were caught on the first catching day (3 Jan), none of them in the pitfall traps.
- On the second day (4 Jan), three new skinks were caught (two from pitfall traps) and two from the previous day.
- On the third day (5 Jan), only one skink was caught (for the third consecutive day).
- On the fourth day (6 Jan), two new and two retrap skinks were caught. The newly caught animals were both in pitfall traps. One of the skinks was caught in pitfall trap C01, which is unusually far back among the grass for a shore skink. At the time we were unsure of its identification, and so have included it in the list. It was very unlike the copper skinks in the field guide (much paler and more marked, but without the checkerboard face pattern). Having looked at other photos on line since our return, we think that copper skink is now a more likely identification (see photos below).
- On the fifth day (7 Jan), one skink was retrapped.
- On the sixth day (8 Jan), two skinks were retrapped.

Nine individuals were caught and there were eight further retrap captures. There were four gravid females, one sub-adult and four other adults.

Thirteen of the captures were among seaweed or under logs on the beach. The other four captures were from the pitfall traps (A01, A05, A05 and C01). None of the captures were further north than A05, suggesting that the skinks were concentrated at the southern end of the beach. The beach structure changes markedly along its length with little or no boulders at the northern end.

Other skink captures

Six moko skinks and two (or three) copper skinks were captured, mostly from the C-line, though there were two mokos caught in B05 and B06 on the first catching day.

Comments and issues for future reference

A series of photographs was taken from fixed vantage points. These will be useful in tracking yearly changes to beach structure and the availability of seaweed and logs for shelter.

This year there were no difficulties arising from having too many people on the beach at once.

Kay Milton and John Stewart
16th January 2012

Photos of skink from trap C01, fourth catching day (the white dot is on the bag, not the skink)



Photos of Fisherman's Bay beach (for future reference)



From A11



From A08



From B01



From A01



From bank north of beach