

Shore Skink Survey, Tiritiri Matangi Island, 2 January to 8 January 2013



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

Other helpers: Chris Smith (CS). Chris is the hihi researcher for the 2012-13 season.

Survey Methods

The pitfall traps were installed/checked on 23rd December 2012. All the 'C' line and B05, B09, B10 and B11 had been left in place from the 2011/12 survey. One of these traps had lost its plastic lid, but all others were in a satisfactory condition. The traps had been used in September 2012 by JJ and Kate McLinnes (DOC), when trapping animals for salmonella testing.

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. The traps were emptied, baited and set on the afternoon of the 2nd January. Checking and hand-searching were carried out between 8.00 am and 10.00 am each day, except 3rd January, when checking started shortly after 7.00 am. The routine on all catching days was as follows:

- The team was divided into two: three people worked on the traps and the remainder (three or four) hand-searched along the shore. 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 or three people moved systematically from row 11 to row 1, re-baiting and setting the traps. Other team members continued hand-searching under logs and seaweed.
- On Day 7 (8th January) 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 B05, B09, B10 and B11) were filled with rocks or sand, plastic lids firmly placed, wooden lids set over and weighed down with rocks, marked with flagging tape, and left in a safe condition for the next survey (which we understand will be in January 2015).

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 JS and KM.

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, RB, MF, SF	KM, JS, JJ, AB, MF, RB	KM, JS, JJ, MF, AB, RB, SF	KM, JS, JJ, MF, AB, RB	KM, JS, JJ, MF, SF, CS	KM, JS, JJ, MF, AB, RB	KM, JS, JJ, MF, SF, AB, RB

Results

Shore skinks

- One skink was caught in a trap on the first catching day (3rd Jan), another was seen by hand-searchers but not caught. This individual was distinctive in having lost much of its tail, and it was not seen again during the survey.
- On the second day (4th Jan), one new skink was caught by hand-searchers.
- On the third day (5th Jan), three new skinks were caught, two in traps and one by hand-searchers (the first gravid female). One of those caught in a trap was particularly long at 130mm.
- On the fourth day (6th Jan), one new skink and one retrap skink were caught, both in traps. One had a slightly enlarged abdomen and we were uncertain whether it was gravid.
- On the fifth day (7th Jan), four new skinks were caught, including a gravid female and another unusually large individual (130mm).
- On the sixth day (8th Jan), one new skink was caught.

Eleven individuals were caught and there was one recapture. Two, possibly three, were gravid; all skinks caught were adult. A twelfth individual was seen on the first day but not caught and not seen again.

Of the twelve captures, three were under logs or seaweed and nine were in pitfall traps. This contrasts with the January 2012 survey, when 13 out of 17 were under logs or seaweed and only four were in pitfall traps. There were also far fewer recaptures in 2013 – only one, while there were eight in 2012.

Another difference was that more of the skinks were found towards the northern end of the beach than in 2012, when none of the captures had been further north than A05. This year, five of the captures were north of A05, one as far north as A10. Photos of the beach taken from near A11 do not show much change in the amount of debris at the northern end (below). One individual was found under a large log near the southern end of the beach, about three metres above high water mark.



From A11 January 2012



From A11 January 2013

Other skink captures

Nine moko skinks and four copper skinks were captured; all the coppers and all but one of the mokos were in the C-line.

Comments

Once again, photos were taken to show the state of the beach (see above and below). While the photos don't show much change between years, we felt that there were fewer 'good' patches of seaweed and other debris on the beach this year and that it was very dry under what material was present. However, there did seem to be plenty of insects among the weed and debris.

Having six or seven people on the beach worked well this year as all but one (CS) were experienced and their presence enabled us to operate two teams, one for traps and one for hand-searching.

Kay Milton and John Stewart
16th January 2013



From bank north of beach 2012



From same position, 2013