

## **Tuatara move home**

25.10.2003 0.32 am

Sixty northern tuatara leave their home on Middle Island today and take up residence on Tiritiri Matangi Island, off the end of the Whangaparaoa Peninsula.

The new colony will provide the only place, other than Somes Island in Wellington Harbour, where the public can see tuatara in their natural habitat.

The last tuatara sighted on Tiritiri Matangi was made by the lighthouse keeper in 1902.

## **Tuatara returned to Tiritiri after 100 years**

28.10.2003

By ANNE BESTON

New Zealand's ancient, spiny-backed reptile has returned to an ancestral home near Auckland after a 100-year absence.

Sixty tuatara (*Sphenodon punctatus*) were flown by helicopter from the Mercury Islands, off the Coromandel Peninsula, to the inner-Hauraki Gulf island wildlife sanctuary of Tiritiri Matangi Island at the weekend.

Scientists, the Department of Conservation and the volunteers behind the creation of the open sanctuary, Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi, have spent 10 years on the project.

The last reported tuatara sighting on Tiri was by a lighthouse keeper in 1902.

The newcomers were given a VIP welcome, with a powhiri by Coromandel iwi and 1m-long burrows specially prepared.

The reptiles, which will wear electronic locators, were released at several sites, including the valley below the popular Karau Track.

"We really hope the public get to see them, they are such an amazing species," said volunteer Cathy Catto.

Tuatara expert Charles Daugherty, a professor at Victoria University, said because tuatara did nothing in a hurry, visitors had a reasonable chance of spotting one. "They come out during the day and often just sit there," he said.

The released tuatara are of breeding age, but visitors may have to wait a while to see any young - they produce eggs only every two to four years and incubation takes between 12 and 15 months.

There are two recognised species of tuatara - those found on a Cook Strait island in the 1980s are now recognised as a separate species from North Island tuatara.

Tuatara are the last survivors of the Sphenodontia family and have barely changed since they walked with the dinosaurs some 200 million years ago.

The total population is estimated at 100,000.