

ENDEMIC SPECIES FEATURE

MOKO PIRIRĀKAU

Forest gecko

Mokopirirakau granulatus

You will be lucky to spot this highly cryptic resident of the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary. It's bark-like dorsal camouflage blends in beautifully with the trees on which it clings. Further to this, forest geckos can quickly change the shade of their dorsal colouration to better blend in. This adaptation may also enhance thermoregulation; dark colours absorb heat faster. Colours vary among populations from dark to reddish brown through to pale grey. Plenty of black and white is also thrown into the mix. Their bellies are grey and blotchy. They typically sport a dark V-shaped line between their eyes. Their mouths are edged with white scales. If you are lucky enough to find one and get close, you may notice the lining of their mouth is yellow or orange and their tongue is pink, yellow or bright orange. The soles of their feet are yellow. From snout to vent, they may grow up to 89mm long.

New Zealand's geckos fall into two categories, the grey-brown and the green geckos. No prize for guessing forest geckos belong to the grey-brown group. As with others in this group, they are mostly nocturnal, but may be seen during the day basking in the sun. Forest geckos are omnivorous, feeding on small invertebrates, such as flies, moths, beetles and spiders, as well as berries and nectar.

New Zealand's geckos are unusual in that they give birth to live young. Geckos elsewhere in the world lay eggs, with the exception of at least one species in New Caledonia. Forest geckos typically mate in autumn or spring and give birth to twins in mid or late summer.



Mokopirirakau granulatus | Cupola gecko
Nelson Lakes National Park © Roger Waddell, used with permission



Mokopirirakau granulatus | Forest gecko on kohekohe, Te Pākeka/Maud Island, Marlborough Sounds © Nick Harker, used with permission

Forest geckos have a sash-like distribution across New Zealand, extending on the North Island from Northland, south of the Aupouri Peninsula, to Taranaki and Bay of Plenty and on the South Island from Marlborough across to Tasman and south to Westland. They are also found on a number of offshore islands. Vulnerable to mammalian predators and habitat loss, they are classified as 'at risk, declining'.

Written by:
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Mokopirirakau granulatus | Forest gecko
Great Barrier Island on *Coprosma rhamnoides*
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