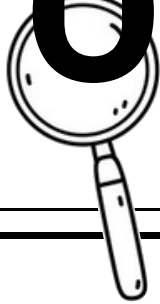


THE WAIMĀRAMA KIDS CHRONICLE



WALKING WITH DINOSAURS

THE RETURN OF THE TUATARA

Tuatara are a unique and rare reptile found only in Aotearoa. They are not a lizard, but rather the last remaining members of an ancient order of Reptiles, Rhynchocephalia. The oldest fossils of tuatara have been found in rocks of the Jurassic age- from 180 million years ago. That means they used to spend their time dodging the giant footsteps of dinosaurs! In fact, the tuatara is often referred to as a “Living Fossil”, meaning that it hasn’t changed a whole lot in nearly 200 million years!

The Brook Waimārama Sanctuary is now home to 65 of these amazing reptiles, and you can look out for them within the mouse enclosure when you come and explore the sanctuary!

A THIRD EYE... Tuatara, like some lizards, have a third, or “parietal”, eye on their forehead. The parietal eye doesn’t really resemble a normal eye, as it becomes covered in scales within the tuataras first few months of life, but it does help the tuatara sense light and dark, like an inbuilt alarm clock telling them night from day, as well as the time of year.

HOT AND COLD

Like many other reptiles, the temperature of the nest determines the gender of the young tuatara while they develop in the egg.



Higher temperatures mean more males, while cooler temperatures will mean more females. Eggs take up to 16 MONTHS to hatch! When it gets too cold, egg development will stop, starting again when things warm up again.

GUARDIANS OF THE NGÂHERE

In Māori legend, tuatara are often seen as kaitiaki (guardians) of knowledge and the natural world, carrying memories of the lands history and traditions. Tuatara can live for over 100 years, though maybe that doesn’t feel like too long if your ancestors have already been around for 180 million years!

COOL FACTS ABOUT THE TUATARA



WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

Tuatara are ambush predators, meaning they will sit and wait for their prey to come to them. Their diet consists of beetles, wētā, worms, millipedes and spiders, along with small lizards, seabird eggs and chicks, and sometimes even their own young!!



A LOOONG LIFE

Tuatara can take up to 16 months to hatch out of their egg, and things don't get any quicker from there. They aren't able to reproduce until they are around 15 years old, will keep growing until they're about 35 years old, and can live until they're over 100 years old!



NOT TO COLD, NOT TO HOT, BUT JUUUST RIGHT

Tuatara are most active at night, but will also bask in the sun during the day. They love it when it's warm and wet, but generally like it a lot cooler than other reptiles. In fact, temperatures over 28 degrees are generally fatal!

I WONDER...?



THINK LIKE A SCIENTIST... WHAT DO YOU WONDER?

- Why are some animals nocturnal while others are diurnal (active in the day), or even crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk)?
- What special senses do nocturnal animals use to find food and avoid predators
- How do human activities affect nocturnal animals?

UNDER THREAT...

Tuatara disappeared from the New Zealand mainland over 100 years ago. Can you guess why?



If you guessed these guys, you'd be right! The kiore, or Pacific Rat, first hitched a ride to New Zealand with the Polynesian ancestors of the Māori. They, along with their bigger cousins (the ship and Norway rats), were quick to gobble up young Tuatara and their eggs, until the entire population of Tuatara was nearly extinct on the mainland in the 1840's. Setting up rat traps on your property is one of the best things you can do to help out Aotearoa's wildlife - find out more at: <https://www.kidsgreeningtaupo.org.nz/activities-nature-connection/get-trapping>

JUNIOR RANGER'S IN ACTION!

CREATE A LIZARD-FRIENDLY GARDEN While tuatara are not lizards, and are definitely not going to be found in your garden, there are around 120 native lizard species in New Zealand, and we can help them to thrive in our own backyard! Create a 'lizard lounge' by choosing a lovely warm spot in your garden, ideally in a place where there are overhanging shrubs and grasses. Lizards like hiding in cracks, so add in some rotten wood, corrugated iron, and tunnels or old pots. Add a little bowl of water, and maybe a tracking tunnel (visit <https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/1171-making-a-tracking-tunnel> for instructions) so you can see if you have any visitors to your lizard lounge!