

Meeting and Trip reports

Talk on New Zealand Geckos 24 Sept.

reviewed by *Moirra Parker*

There was a good crowd at the new Benham building to hear Mandy Tocher, a Department of Conservation scientist, talk on New Zealand geckos. There are 41 species of gecko. Thirty three belong to the genus *Hoplodactylus* – grey/brown in colour and considered to be nocturnal. Nine belong to the genus *Naultinus* and are green. Mandy illustrated her talk with superb slides taken by Bruce Thomas, Tony Whitaker and Rod Morris, which gave us a glimpse of the wonderful variety of colours and patterns and the different habitats where these delightful animals are found.

These are just a few of the many geckos that we were able to see:

The striped gecko, that is often found in *Muehlenbeckia*; the rough scaled gecko from Marlborough; the black-eyed gecko with a grey body, black eyes and may live over 50 years in the alpine zone; Duvaucel's gecko (up to 120 gm) found only on offshore islands; the West Coast green gecko that may hybridise with the green jewelled gecko where their respective ranges meet; the Pacific gecko; the North Island green gecko; and a minute 3 cm long gecko from Otago and Marlborough.

Mandy mentioned several new species, such as a gecko found on Mt Creighton near Glenorchy that is possibly a new species of forest gecko; a new gecko found on Mt Roy in Otago that is closely related to one in the Catlins, and a gecko found 3–4 years ago on a Takitimu scree slope. The forest geckos particularly are so well camouflaged, that it was difficult to find the animal in some of the slides. The idea of a gecko dog to search for geckos seems a good one and we wish Mandy well with her training.

One of the most striking geckos is the Harlequin gecko from Stewart Island, which is a target for poachers collecting for markets in the USA and Japan. But other patterned and brightly coloured geckos are also poached. It was disappointing to learn that the proposal to CITES to include all New Zealand geckos on appendix II of the schedule was recently turned down. Non human predators are numerous and include mice, rats, all mustelids, magpies, hawks, starlings, hedgehogs and particularly cats.

In other parts of the world geckos are insectivorous, yet in New Zealand geckos also feed on pollen, fruit and nectar. The emphasis on plant food could be that more sugar is needed in our cool climate. On offshore islands the biomass of geckos is spectacular and geckos may have a role in plant pollination and seed dispersal.

DoC hopes to enlarge its gecko distribution database, which has 10263 entries to date. Botanical Society members are asked to send in the location, species and photos (if possible) of any unusual geckos that they see.

Mandy's email address is mtocher@doc.govt.nz

Muehlenbeckia australis. **Audrey Eagle**
Eagle's Trees and Shrubs of
New Zealand in Colour, 1975.

