



Mokomoko Newsletter

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Hello everyone

COET volunteers have been busy restoring the 14-ha pest-free fenced sanctuary near Alexandra by planting native species, removing weeds, and translocating native lizards. We have some exciting lizard news for you.

Jewelled geckos

Since March this year, we have translocated 86 jewelled geckos into the main gully of the sanctuary. This species is extinct from Central Otago, until now.

We have been lucky to contract New Zealand's authority on this species, Carey Knox, from Wildland Consultants. Carey and volunteers captured geckos from an area on the Lammermoor Range where they are widespread and common, including a small area where forestry is taking over their habitat. Their natural habitat in this area is tussocks and shrubs, so we were a little nervous about moving geckos to Central Otago's different habitat and extreme environment. However, their survival over winter appears to have been very good.

What's more, some of the geckos have had babies and are now pregnant again.



One of the magnificent jewelled geckos released into the Mokomoko Dryland Sanctuary this year.



The first jewelled gecko being released by Cohen Anderson, assisted by Carey Knox.



Another jewelled gecko being released by COET volunteer, Rachel Baxter.



These gorgeous lizards are out during the day, but they can be hard to see (unless you're Carey Knox). It's takes patience, quietness, and stealth to see them, which in fact is a very therapeutic way to spend an afternoon!

We are very excited about the prospects for this healthy founder population of geckos. They are now finally returned to Central Otago.

Grand and Otago skinks

Early this month, we released 31 grand skinks, and 36 Otago skinks, on the schist rock outcrops inside the big fence. A dozen or so more skinks will follow soon.

These skinks are from the western part of their range where there is no protection from introduced predators. Although they are the same species as those in the eastern part of their range around Macraes Flat (where they are well protected by DOC's predator trapping), these western animals are genetically distinct and at risk.

In 2014, DOC salvaged a group of western skinks from the wild to secure them in captivity, but despite the best efforts of captive breeders, they have not bred as well as animals from the east. The decision to transfer them to the Mokomoko Dryland Sanctuary was based on expert knowledge, but it is still experimental. Time will tell if these animals settle and breed, but we expect they will.



COET volunteers, Amanda Rogers and Jo Wilson, release a fully-grown Otago skink.



Joshua Forrest from Isaac Conservation Park saying farewell to one of the Otago skinks he looked after in captivity.



Christina Becker-Fifield and Bonnie Wilkins, keepers at the Kiwi Birdlife Park in Queenstown, pointing out a grand skink they have just released.



The little 0.3-ha fence next door to the bigger fence still holds a dozen or so western skinks, but these will be transferred to the big fence as soon as we can catch them. The big fence offers far greater opportunity for the skinks to thrive. The small fence will remain a separate entity for pilot studies where lizards can be monitored with greater certainty for short periods.

So that makes six species of lizard currently inside the sanctuary – jewelled geckos, grand skinks, Otago skinks, and pre-existing common species McCann’s skinks, Southern grass skinks, and Schist geckos. Next year, the plan is to translocate green skinks into the sanctuary.

We are very grateful for the support from staff at the Alexandra DOC office. Thank you also to the captive breeders Mike Kean, Dennis Keall, Isaac Conservation Park, Kiwi Birdlife Park, Wellington Zoo, and Auckland Zoo. And, of course, a huge thanks to the many COET volunteers, our primary funders (Central Lakes Trust, DOC Community Fund, Lotteries Grants Board, Landcare Research, Otago Community Trust, Jean Malpas Estate, Transpower), private funders, and the ongoing accounting support from ICL Chartered Accountants Ltd.

Have a great break everyone.

Trustees of the Central Otago Ecological Trust



An adult western Otago skink relaxing on schist rock inside the Mokomoko Dryland Sanctuary.



Volunteers scoping out release sites for jewelled geckos.



Volunteers feeling proud of themselves after a lizard release session.



Central Otago Ecological Trust
A Community-led Conservation Project

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