

A NOTE ON THE LIZARDS OF THE SLIPPER ISLAND GROUP

by D.R. Towns*

The composition of the lizard fauna of Slipper, Penguin and Rabbit Islands was investigated during an Auckland University Field Club Scientific Camp based on Slipper Island in August, 1973. Most of the searching was carried out on Slipper Island, but brief visits were also made to Rabbit and Penguin Islands and to Watchman Rock, a small islet 1 km west of Slipper.

The three main islands exhibit two different habitat types. Slipper Island, which has been farmed for about a century³ has few remaining areas suitable for lizards, other than on the boulder beaches. In contrast Penguin and Rabbit Islands are covered mainly by pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*) dominated forest.²

For maps and descriptions of the islands see Hayward and Moore.³

The presence of rats on New Zealand offshore islands has been shown to limit the diversity and abundance of lizards inhabiting the same islands^{4,5,6,9,10}. Unfortunately rats are present on the three largest islands in the Slipper Group, with kiore (*Rattus exulans*) on Rabbit and Penguin¹ and *R. norvegicus* on Slipper.³

The only lizard species so far recorded from these islands were collected during a Department of Internal Affairs visit to Penguin and Rabbit Islands in 1967.¹ Two lizard species captured on Penguin by Adams were identified by Prof. Robb as the skink *Leiolopisma smithi smithi* and the giant gecko *Hoplodactylus duvauceli* (J. Robb, pers. comm.). These were the only two species captured by the present author and were distributed throughout the the group as follows:

SLIPPER ISLAND	<i>Leiolopisma smithi</i>
PENGUIN ISLAND	<i>Leiolopisma smithi</i> , <i>Hoplodactylus duvauceli</i>
RABBIT ISLAND	<i>Leiolopisma smithi</i> , <i>Hoplodactylus duvauceli</i>
WATCHMAN ROCK	No sign of any lizards, despite careful searching.

All of the lizards were found on boulder beaches.

Two species are notably absent from the above list. The gecko *Hoplodactylus pacificus* is usually more common than *H. duvauceli*, and was probably overlooked. The most likely refuge for this species on Slipper Island would be the high cliffs on the west coast, while the areas of pohutukawa would provide a suitable habitat on Rabbit and Penguin.

The second absent species, the skink *Leiolopisma suteri* has been found on the boulder beaches of islands where rats are extremely abundant (e.g. Cuvier Island⁷). However, careful searching on the beaches of Slipper Island, some of which seemed ideal for the species, produced no sign of its presence.

The apparent absence of *L. suteri* from the Slipper Group suggests that the more northern Alderman Islands, where this skink is common,⁸ form the lizards' southern geographic limit.

*Department of Zoology, University of Auckland.

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