

# News Release



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

16<sup>th</sup> January 2009

## Sun, sand and skinks

Beach goes on the Hauraki Gulf island of Motuihe will soon be sharing the sand with some scaly companions, with the release of 70 shore skinks on Sunday.

The release, led by the Motuihe Trust, with the support of the Department of Conservation (DOC), will see the sun-loving lizards join threatened wildlife such as kakariki or red-crowned parakeets and tieke or saddlebacks on the predator free island. The lizards are being translocated from the open sanctuary at Tawharanui Regional Park, managed by the Auckland Regional Council in partnership with the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary Society Inc, and from Massey University's captive reptile facility at the Albany campus.

The reintroduction of shore skinks is a part of a community driven ecological and historical restoration of the island, led by the Motuihe Trust in partnership with DOC. This is the first species of lizard to be reintroduced to the island.

John Laurence, Chairman of the Motuihe Trust, said "these lizards will add to the biodiversity of this pest free haven, which already includes moko and copper skinks. There are also more bird releases planned for this year."

DOC Auckland Area Manager, Brett Butland, praised the work of the Trust in the lead up to the release.

"Volunteers from the Motuihe Trust have implemented a first class monitoring programme to find out more about the diversity and abundance of skinks and other reptiles on the island. They have also discovered the island holds the rich insect diet that skinks thrive on. This is alongside all the ground work they have done over the years to create suitable habitats for our native species."

The release is part of research by Massey University ecology Masters student, Ben Barr.

Mr Barr says at least 30 of the skinks are pregnant females that are expected to give birth to between three and eight babies each in February.

"This will more than double the population of new migrants within a month of their arrival," he said.

All the lizards have been in quarantine at Massey's reptile facility throughout January, so they could be tested for *salmonella* and *cryptosporidium* to ensure only disease-free skinks are moved to the island.

The plan to restore Motuihe (179 hectares) includes replanting large areas, returning native birds, lizards and insects, conserving historic features, enhancing wetland areas and developing tracks and other visitor facilities.

ENDS

**For more information:** Contact Louise Skelton, DOC Media Officer on 0275 111 222; John Laurence, Motuihe Trust, on 021 942 115; or Ben Barr, Masters student, Massey University Albany on 021 911 839.

### Background Information:

- Shore skinks are usually found on or near the shoreline around the coast of the upper North Island.
- They are diurnal (active during the day), and spend a lot of their time basking in the sun or looking for food (insects).

### Auckland Conservancy

Private Bag 68 908, Cnr Karangahape Road and Liverpool Street, Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone 09-307 9279, Fax 09-377 2919

## 2

- They can be various shades of grey, brown, green or black, and sometimes have a dark stripe along the spine. Their back and sides are typically speckled, giving an overall impression of a speckled rather than striped lizard.
- They can be up to 8cm long, but are often much smaller.
- More information about the Motuihe Island restoration project can be found on the Motuihe Trust website, [www.motuihe.org.nz](http://www.motuihe.org.nz).