



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

1 Skinks



Tussock skink - Photo credit: Sam Purdie

AUTUMN SLOW DOWN: HOW OUR SKINKS PREPARE FOR WINTER

As the days cool and the sun sits lower in the sky, the skinks of our district begin one of the most important seasonal shifts in their year: easing into torpor. You'll still spot them on warm, still afternoons - stretched out on a rock or fencepost, soaking up every last drop of heat - but behind the scenes, their bodies are quietly powering down for the colder months ahead.

Our district is home to a surprising diversity of skinks, from the tussock skink to the elusive cryptic skink, and even some of Aotearoa's rarest lizards like the Otago skink and grand skink in nearby Central Otago habitats.

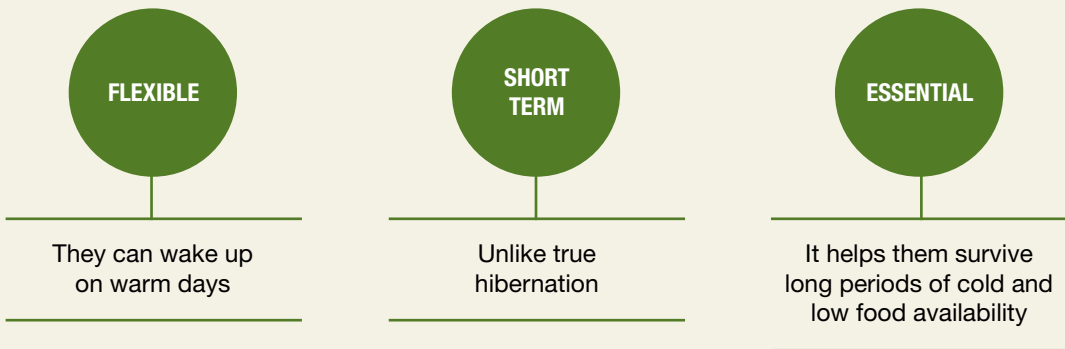
Autumn is a crucial time for skinks. Food becomes harder to find, nights get colder, and energy needs to be conserved. Torpor allows them to ride out winter safely, waking only on the warmest days to bask or forage before retreating again to sheltered hideaways.

These small, fast, sun loving reptiles are more common than many people realise - but their survival depends heavily on the quality of the habitat we create and protect around our homes, tracks, and reserves.



WHAT IS TORPOR?

Torpor is a temporary, energy saving state where an animal's body temperature, heart rate, and activity levels drop significantly. For reptiles like skinks, torpor is:



Think of it as a "power saving mode" that keeps them going through winter.



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAKE LIFE EASIER FOR OUR LOCAL REPTILES

You can support skinks and other reptiles get through the colder months by creating safe, warm, predator resistant spaces in your garden. Here are simple, effective options:

1. BUILD A "SKINK STACK"

LAYER:

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Flat rocks

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Broken terracotta pots

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Untreated timber offcuts

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Rock piles

This creates warm, dry crevices for shelter.

2. LEAVE SOME "MESSY" AREAS

SKINKS LOVE:

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Long grass

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Dense groundcover

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Leaf litter

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Log piles

These provide hiding spots and insect food.

3. PLANT LOW, DENSE NATIVES

GREAT OPTIONS INCLUDE:

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Muehlenbeckia

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Coprosma species

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Porcupine shrub

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Tussocks

These create shade, cover, and hunting habitat.

4. KEEP CATS AND DOGS AWAY FROM BASKING SPOTS

Skinks are most vulnerable when sunning themselves.

5. AVOID USING SLUG PELLETS OR INSECTICIDES LIKE SPIDER SPRAYS

These reduce their food supply and can harm them directly.

FUN FACT

Many of our local skinks, including several species found in our district, give birth to **live young**, not eggs - a rare trait among reptiles globally, and one that helps them survive in cooler climates like ours.

At QLDC we're such fans of skinks that we've modelled a new AI chatbot on the Nevis skink. We've named him Scout and he'll be soon on hand when you visit the QLDC website to help you with some common queries and finding the information you need.



Why not head out to Tucker Beach Reserve and see if you can spot a McCann's skink. The open, restored habitat gives them plenty of exposed basking spots on sunny Autumn days.



Photo credit: Sam Purdie