

Care Sheet:

Pacific and Forest geckos



Pacific gecko (*Dactylocnemis pacificus*)

Adult Size: up to 80mm SVL.

Threat status: 'At Risk – Declining'.

Lifespan: around 20 years (up to 50).

Habitat: Lowland forest and scrub, often found associated with Manuka / Kanuka in scrubby or swampy areas.

Permit Level: General authorisation.



Forest gecko (*Mokopirirakau granulatus*)

Adult Size: up to 98mm SVL.

Threat status: 'At Risk – Declining'.

Lifespan: around 20 years (up to 50).

Habitat: Lowland forest and scrub, often found associated with Manuka / Kanuka in scrubby or swampy areas.

Permit Level: General authorisation.

Enclosure:

Minimum recommended enclosure size = 50x50x100cm (LxWxH).

Ideal Group Size:

1:2 (M:F).

**Can also include offspring for their first year, though many keepers prefer to raise them separately.*

Compatible Species:

Green geckos, Goldstripe geckos, Small diurnal skinks, Copper, Ornate and Whitaker's skinks.

Recommended Cage Furnishing:

Forest and Pacific geckos are relatively easy to keep and breed in captivity. Both geckos are fairly similar and often co-occur in the wild, but differ slightly in habit / habitat use. Both are primarily arboreal and may occur in forest or scrub, although Pacific geckos spend considerably more time foraging on the ground. Additionally, while both are regarded as nocturnal, Pacific geckos are more strictly so, relatively timid and often only cryptically bask near a retreat. However, forest geckos are avid sun-baskers and will often fully emerge to bask, or even forage for insects during the day. Because of this the placement of refuges near basking positions (on the northern side of the enclosure next to the mesh) is more crucial for Pacific geckos, which are less-likely to fully emerge from cover to find the most-suitable basking spots. The enclosure should be decorated with live plants, logs, branches, and a layer of leaf litter as a substrate on the floor. Since these geckos are primarily arboreal (tree dwelling), a taller rather than wider cage is preferred. Providing suitable refuges which replicate the natural retreat sites of these species in the wild are crucial. Refuge sites which have proved most-popular include hollow bamboo or polythene pipe (both on

the ground and suspended horizontally near the upper edge on the sides of the enclosure), Spanish moss (though this should not be the only refuge provided), and they have also been found to use ground-based refuge sites such as stacks of Onduline or timber boards with spacers in between leaving just enough gap for a gecko to squeeze in.

Breeding:

Mating generally occurs in autumn for both species, and females give birth to twins in late summer for forest geckos or autumn for Pacific geckos. However, young to be born as late as April where these species are held outside of their natural range. Young geckos are often removed from the adult enclosure and placed in a smaller "baby cage" where they are fed on vinegar / fruit flies (*Drosophila*) and small house flies. Once they have grown in size (usually after approximately two years) they can be returned to a larger "adult" enclosure.

Diet:

These geckos are primarily insectivorous (insect eating) and are most commonly fed live insects such as flies, moths, small beetles, spiders, crickets, grasshoppers. Insects can be wild caught or captive-bred, although reptile vitamin supplements will need to be added to captive-bred insects. These geckos are major pollinators of some native plants and lick sweet nectar or honeydew in the wild. In captivity they are very fond of sweet fruit mixtures (fruit puree, mashed banana etc.) and diluted honey. However, care should be taken not to feed too much of this high-calory food as these geckos are very prone to becoming overweight / obese in captivity (signs include grossly distended / fat tails, and neck-jowls).

Notes:

- Pacific geckos are a fast-moving and nervous species. As such they are highly prone to tail loss so handling of this species should be kept to a minimum.
- Forest geckos are probably the most-readily available species in captivity. Take care when holding this species to not breed excessive numbers of animals as they may be hard to re-home, and cannot be released into the wild.
- 'Forest geckos' in captivity comprise two species Forest geckos (*Mokopirirakau granulatus*) and Ngahere geckos (*Mokopirirakau* "southern North Island"), forest geckos from the West Coast region of the South Island are also held in captivity. Care should be taken to maintain these populations separately and not allow them to interbreed / hybridise in captivity.
- Pacific geckos in captivity may comprise one or several species of *Dactylocnemis* geckos. Try to ascertain which species you are holding and ensure they do not hybridise with others. If you are unsure consult an expert on which species you hold, your local NZHS rep can put you in touch with a herpetologist who can help.