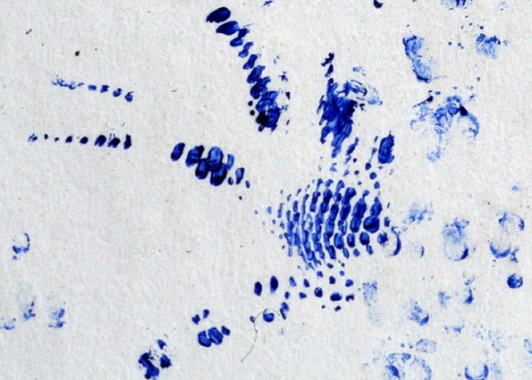
**MOKOMOKO DRYLAND SANCTUARY. Central Otago Ecological Trust**

**THE LIZARDS**

The Otago Skink, *Oligosoma otagense,* and the Grand skink, *Oligosoma grande,* endemic to Otago and found nowhere else in the world, are two of the most threatened species in New Zealand. They were once widespread throughout Central Otago but can no longer survive in the wild in the long term unless protected from introduced predators. The Central Otago Ecological Trust (COET, see below) has built a pest-proof fence called the Mokomoko Dryland Sanctuary which excludes all predators. In spring 2016, the Trust will release a healthy selection of skinks. Post-release photography of individually-recognizable skinks provides data on survival and breeding success. This is the least invasive technique for keeping track of these species during their long lives. *Photo: Oligosoma otagense.*

**THE PESTS**

Feral cats, stoats, ferrets, weasels, hedgehogs, mice, rats, rabbits, hares and possums are being eradicated from the sanctuary. The first seven of these readily dine on skinks and geckos, the other three eat the food plants we are adding to enhance natural habitat ecosystems. Ridding the site of mice is the greatest challenge – we have witnessed mice attacking skinks much larger than themselves, and newborn lizards are at high risk from these clever aggressors. Tracking tunnels are used to help monitor predator incursions inside the fence. They show the footprints of pests and signal the need for trapping. They also reveal the distinctive tracks of roaming skinks. *Photo:* *Foot-print of an Otago skink that has run over a non-toxic ink pad and white paper in a tracking tunnel.*

**A PEST-PROOF FENCE**

COET has built a 1.6 km pest-proof fence to enclose 14 hectares of public conservation land near Alexandra. It is now proven that if predator species are removed from an area, Grand and Otago skink populations will recover. When the fenced area has been declared free of predators, the skink species that have become extinct from this area, and are severely threatened in their present range, will be re-introduced from the remaining wild populations via a captive breeding programme where offspring will be released. It is expected that the fenced sanctuary will be ready for skinks by 2016. *Photo: The pest-proof fence surrounding the Mokomoko Dryland Sanctuary*.

**WEEDING AND PLANTING**

Lizards need a variety of plants at many levels, especially those which bear nectar and fruit and attract insects and other invertebrates, providing a food source in season. A critical part of the project is to restore the dryland ecosystem by propagating and reintroducing local native species. The re-introduction site is in good condition with abundant, fruiting Coprosma shrubs and Melicytus, but it requires enhancement. The volunteer team is weeding out briar and other invasive species, planting native herbs, tussocks, the small-leaved native shrubs Olearia, Coprosma, Muehlenbeckia, Carmichaelia, Corokia and Aristotelia; and Kowhai and Totara trees, both of which once grew here. The site has a natural creek and deeply bedded schist rock outcrops. *Photo: A fruiting ‘porcupine shrub’, Melicytus alpinus.*

**THE PEOPLE**

COET is a community group dedicated to wildlife conservation in Central Otago. Member volunteers carry out much of the work on the site, weeding, planting, monitoring and general maintenance. The Trust has a high profile in the community. There are 91 active volunteers, 18 foundation members, 29 private donors, 23 trust and agency donors and 152 people registered for the COET newsletter. School programs, field days for the general public, group visits, and formal partnerships with the Department of Conservation, Central Stories Museum and Landcare Research, give the group a wide reach. The Central Stories Museum in Alexandra has a public display of live Otago skinks donated by the Trust. *Photo: Volunteers releasing skinks.*

#### Information for Visitors

#### You are visiting the Mokomoko Dryland Sanctuary, an area where introduced pests have been eradicated and weeds are under control. Now is the time to consider your footwear, packs and vehicles for these nasties. Time to leave your pet mice and rats behind!

#### Please keep sanctuary gates closed at all times.

#### To drive to the site, vehicles should be of the medium weight 4 wheel drive capacity. Light 4x4s with road tyres will not be suitable. Drivers must be experienced.

#### Be aware of the hazards driving into the site, in particular the Conroy’s Road turnoff. Leave the gate on the road in as you find it.

#### Carry water, sunscreen and sun hats - the temperatures can be high and catch you out. Supplies are held in the tool chest on site but these are for emergency use only.

#### Bring a whole range of clothing as it can also turn very cold.

#### Areas of this reserve are steep and rugged, robust footwear is required.

#### Cellphone coverage is limited to the ridges within the sanctuary.

#### Before the activity commences, your team leader will brief you on possible hazards.

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