

Tuatara babies

Read all about the programme that helps keep tuatara populations high. This programme is world famous. What if you were part of the team that tried it first? Tell us what it was like!

Eggs are collected in October and on the islands, they're very hard to find. The tuatara team watches as the female builds her nest. It's often in a sunny spot.



Some eggs are left to incubate naturally but others are taken. They're off to Victoria University!



The little rubbery eggs start off at 5 grams and grow to 15 grams. That's giant jaffa size! Eight eggs sit in an incubator inside an ice cream container. It's labelled with their island.



The incubators look like fridges but they're warm inside. If the temperature is set at 18 degrees the tuatara will be male but at 22 degrees they will be mostly female. If it's too warm or too cold they won't hatch.



After 12 to 16 months the little tuatara breaks through using an egg tooth at the tip of their nose. Some babies spring straight out and run around but others push and pant for up to 12 hours.



They live on the yolk of their egg for up to two weeks then look for prey. They watch and grab anything that moves -even little tails. If you sweep your hand over their home, they'll freeze or hide. They seem to know all about birds.



Crickets and flies are dropped in the cages three times a week. The crickets hide but the flies just walk around waiting to be eaten. They're coated with sticky vitamin drops then calcium powder so they make great food.



Slaters, spiders and other invertebrates live in the bark and soil too...until they're eaten. Some babies get spider bites and end up with a little white lump!



Once a week each little tuatara is weighed just in case they are hopeless hunters. Shedding skin is peeled off like sunburnt skin on humans. Shed skin can wrap tightly around a baby tuatara's feet and cut off circulation like a docking ring on a lamb's tail.



On moist ground the babies can get foot infections. They have foot baths in antiseptic because antibiotics work very slowly on tuatara.



You are part of the tuatara team at Victoria University when the programme **first** starts.

List what you'll need and keep a diary, with dates, that shows the programme **in action the very first time** from collecting the eggs to the tuatara release back on the islands.

You need things to get to and from the islands, things for your stay and things to keep tuatara safe and well at the university before release.