

## Tuatara - How many birthdays does a Tuatara have?



### Fact

- A Tuatara has a very long life span and could probably have over 100 birthdays.
- Tuataras are native New Zealand reptiles – not lizards – and Tuataras have been around for about 140 million years (since the time of Dinosaurs).
- A Tuatara does everything slowly including breathing, growing and moving. Even its heartbeat is much slower than other animals.
- A Tuatara doesn't move much between dawn and lunchtime.

### Do you know

- The name Tuatara in Maori means 'peaks on the back'.
- The spines on a Tuatara's back look sharp and hard, but they're actually quite soft. They're triangular folds of skin.
- Before humans arrived in New Zealand, Tuatara could be found all over the place but now they're almost extinct. This was probably because of the changes in their habitat because of bush and forest being cleared and because of the introduction of animals like the rat, kiore.
- Tuataras like to eat things like spiders, insects, worms, slaters, snails and birds eggs and chicks.
- Tuataras have very sharp teeth. There are two rows of teeth in the upper jaw and one row in the lower jaw. This gives the tuatara a vice like grip.
- Tuataras are pretty much nocturnal creatures. They're most active in the cool of the evening when they dig and feed.

### Experiments you can do

You probably won't find a Tuatara, but have you got a lizard in your garden? You'll need to be very quiet and look in places where there are plenty of places for a lizard to hide. Skinks and Geckos are native lizards. If you do find one just watch it see what it does, where it goes, what it eats and how it hides.

### Other Investigations

Find out more about these "dinosaurs". Your school library or local public library is bound to have more information about Tuatara. Find out what makes them different to lizards. I'll give you one clue – they have an extra eye when they're born, but where is it? Find out if they're warm blooded or cold blooded? Are Tuatara mammals?