

## News Release



### 11 Precious Baby Tuatara Arrivals

**Rotorua, 16 April 2011** – Ancient stories are hatching at Rotorua's Rainbow Springs with the recent arrival of 11 precious baby tuataras.

New Zealand's own living dinosaurs are very rarely bred in captivity and the eggs hatched between 30 March and 10 April to proud parents Honey (24) and Buggy (53,) after a 184-day incubation period. It's Rainbow Springs first hatch of tuatara eggs and believed to be one of the largest clutch of eggs to successfully hatch in captivity in New Zealand.

"It's been a slow and painstaking wait for the arrival of the baby tuataras after such a long incubation period, especially after a previous clutch of eggs never hatched. It was truly amazing to see 11 healthy baby tuataras emerge over the last few weeks. We couldn't believe it, they just kept on popping out," says Michelle Caldwell, General Manager, Rainbow Springs Kiwi Wildlife Park.

"It's very special to see such an iconic New Zealand reptile hatching, especially when tuataras are on the list of New Zealand's endangered species. Rainbow Springs is very excited to do its part for the conservation of the tuatara."

The baby tuataras are in isolation for the next few weeks gaining strength before moving out into a bigger enclosure, and Rainbow Springs staff say they are off to a great start displaying healthy eating and hunting instincts, feeding on a staple diet of flies, larvae and locusts. The public will have a chance for their first look in about six months time.

While the sex of the new arrivals hasn't yet been determined, as with other reptiles the warmer the soil around the eggs, the greater the chance they will be males and the cooler the soil, the greater the chance they will be females. With further breeding in mind Rainbow Springs is hoping for a mix of both sexes.

The nocturnal tuatara is an ancient reptile which roamed the earth the same time as dinosaurs more than 225 million years ago. Its relatives died out about 60 million years ago which is why tuataras are sometimes called a 'living fossil'.

### **Tuatara facts:**

- Tuatara have the potential to live up to 300 years in the right conditions. The average life span is 80 - 100 years. The oldest in captivity is Henry who is 120 - 130 years old in the Tuatarium at Invercargill.
- Only once every two to five years will the female be ready to mate. The male will sit outside her burrow and wait. If she is interested they will mate and 8 or 9 months later she will lay and bury 6 to 10 eggs in a sunny place. 11 to 16 months later the baby tuatara will hatch.
- Tuatara take 35 years to grow to their full size of 600mm (24 inches or 2ft). They also have the longest incubation period of any reptile with eggs taking up to 15 months to hatch.
- The Tuatara is an unblinking reptile with a thick scaly skin.
- This small 'dragon' also has irregular spines descending from the back of the head and down along the ridged back. The Tuatara are nocturnal animals who also appear sluggish during the hours of darkness.
- In cooler temperatures during winter their metabolism slows down to 10 heart beats per min and 1 breath per hour. During this time, because their metabolism has slowed they don't require food. They can survive without eating for a year!
- Tuatara are 'stand-and wait' carnivores that snatch almost any small animal straying within reach, including weta, spiders, skinks, geckos, and even birds and their eggs or chicks.
- Juvenile tuatara are often diurnal (active during the daytime) to avoid being prey for larger (largely nocturnal) tuatara.
- In Māori tuatara means 'spiny back' and refers to the row of spines down its back.

*Rainbow Springs Kiwi Wildlife Park is an icon of New Zealand tourism and has been open since 1932. Spread over 22 acres of Rotorua parkland, Rainbow Springs is a conservation and breeding haven for endangered New Zealand species such as Kiwi and tuatara. The park offers a unique wildlife experience for visitors, who can see animals in their natural environment, both during the day and night. Features of the award winning tourist attraction include New Zealand's only 'open to view' Kiwi hatchery, and a range of wildlife including trout, tuatara and native birds.*

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