

While teams of trained specialists have been working to save sea birds caught up in the Rena oil spill, locals are caring for other birds through the Tauranga-based ARRC Trust as Elaine Fisher reports

RAISING baby birds rescued from the wild doesn't mean sleepless nights but it is rewarding and even fun, said Liza Schneider, founder of the ARRC trust.

"Our volunteers get a lot of pleasure from successfully raising baby birds and ducklings but with spring here, we need more people to help," said Dr Schneider, veterinarian of Holistic Vets in Tauranga and founder of the trust established in 2003 under the name New Zealand Native Bird and Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation Trust.

When very young or injured birds are brought into the veterinary clinic, they are assessed to see if they need ongoing care. "If they do we send out a text to our volunteers and the first one to respond comes to collect the birds."

The volunteers, who receive information and advice on how to care for birds, are often successful but some birds don't survive.

Dr Schneider said rearing birds appeals to people of all ages including children. "One 10-year-old girl successfully raised a baby sparrow I didn't think would live. She put it in a sock and slept with it the first night to keep it warm."

Sleeping with the birds is however, not necessary. "They do need feeding every two to three hours during the day, but not at night."

Not all birds need rescuing and Dr Schneider advises observing fledglings to see if they can fly or at least hop around and have their parents in close proximity watching over them.

"Such birds are best left alone but if they have any major injuries such as a drooping wing or bleeding area, intervention is appropriate and they can be gently caught and brought in for care."

Most of the birds volunteers look after are introduced species such as sparrows, blackbirds and thrushes and while Dr Schneider said some people might question the value of caring for birds which are common, it is about fostering attitudes of respect and responsibility towards all wildlife.

"Volunteers who become skilled at rearing more common birds can go on to help care for our native birds, but to do so requires a special permit."

While turning the birds into pets is not encouraged, many which have been hand-reared will stay in the locality, giving those who cared for them the pleasure of seeing them in their environment.

Raising ducklings can be especially enjoyable, particularly when it comes to helping them learn to swim.

Dr Schneider advises offering swimming or bathing for short periods once ducklings have a few permanent feathers, but they should be supervised.

"The water should be tepid, and make sure that they are able to dry off in the sun once they are out."

Placing food, such as a high quality, preservative-free cat biscuits in the water will encourage ducklings to dive for food.

Anyone interested should please register on

www.arrc.org.nz, or contact Holistic Vets on 578 7054

