

All creatures great and small

By Dr Liza Schneider



Al the albatross received treatment in a hyperbaric oxygen chamber to mend his damaged wing, becoming a rockstar with the media in the process

Photo courtesy of Bay of Plenty Times

Spring is in the air and with this comes an onslaught of orphaned and injured wildlife needing attention. In Tauranga, the ARRC Wildlife Trust provides veterinary services and rehabilitation support to ensure that these animals are provided with the care and treatment they need.

The ARRC – an acronym for Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre – is a charitable trust that was

established in 2003 and works in collaboration with the Department of Conservation (DoC), the SPCA, surrounding vet clinics, councils and the public. I'm very proud to be a founding trustee.

The vast majority of the wild animals we take in are birds – more than 650 a year – but we do get the occasional call about seals, frogs and even wetas! Birds can be very unforgiving to work with as they often hide their illness or injury very well, and by the time we are able to catch a wild bird and provide it with veterinary care it is often too late.

Fortunately, unhappy endings are usually well compensated for by successful releases, and thankfully we have many of these to savour. Some species are harder than others, and different species of bird are prone to different diseases and

Some species of birds are amazingly intelligent – like kaka, one of our native parrots



A favourite and some of the most resilient baby birds are waxeyes – hatchlings are hardly bigger than the tip of a finger, but they have an incredible will to survive

injuries. It is wonderful to witness the effort that many people will make to rescue and help our wildlife.

Al the albatross

This was evident with an albatross that was brought to Tauranga on a ship. The crew had found him floating in the water with an injured wing. They hoisted him aboard and once the ship had docked I became involved.

I examined this magnificent specimen that stood up to my waist – he would easily have a wingspan of a couple of metres. I found a damaged wing with poor muscle tone, and with no fractures obvious on x-rays. I determined that a nerve injury would be the likely underlying issue, with trauma as the cause.

I bandaged up the wing to help aid healing and Al the albatross, as he came to be known, went to one of our volunteers for care. Upon



reassessment a couple of days later, his wing was no better and his appetite was poor. In discussion with DoC, we decided that it would be in Al's best interests to treat him in our hyperbaric oxygen chamber to help accelerate his healing and boost his vitality, but we carefully had to weigh up the stress that it may cause to a wild bird.

Al uneventfully had a session in our hyperbaric oxygen chamber once a day for three days in a row. He tolerated the chamber with ease and after his first session there was a marked improvement in his demeanour, and he went back to his rehabilitation site and ate ravenously.

Al's wing steadily improved. When the local and national media heard about the story of an albatross receiving hyperbaric oxygen therapy, they descended upon us. Al was a star on national television news and made it to the front page of the Bay of Plenty Times. We were amazed at his apparent lack of stress when cameramen came to photograph and video him, and it almost seemed that he pranced around in front of the camera happy to be a celebrity!

Respect and care

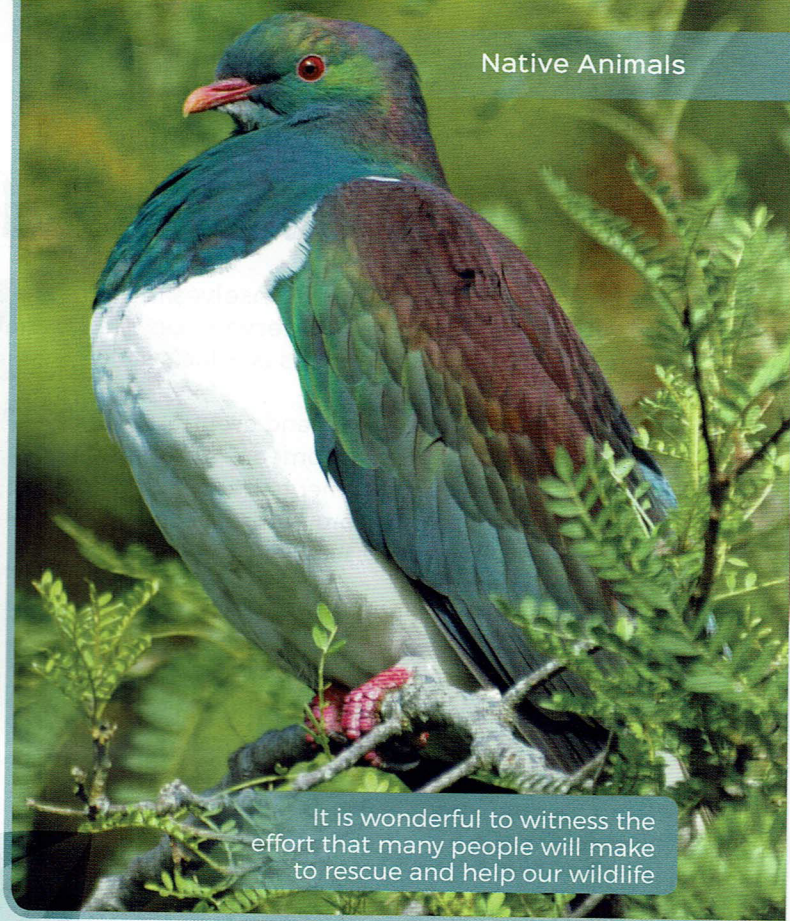
Working with wildlife can be heart-breaking as we witness some of the worst and best in humanity – from baby birds that are brought in with severe injuries because kids have been throwing stones at them or kicking them, through to big tough men who come in, having found a morepork or hawk on the side of the road, cradling it tenderly in their jacket with great concern. It is very gratifying to work with the latter; for the former, we do what we can to educate our community about treating all animals with respect and care.

A harrier hawk was one such bird that was brought into us by a truck driver one day. He had found the hawk in a poor way on the side of the road, and with tears in his eyes the man pleaded with us to do what we could for the bird. Like Al the albatross, the hawk had poor body condition and an open and infected fracture of its wing, indicating that the wing had been broken for at least a couple of days. A wing bandage was attached, and we initiated antibiotic treatment and began dosing a homeopathic and herbal supplement that promotes bone healing.

Day by day the hawk grew stronger and its wing healed. We knew that we were making progress when the hawk began to throw itself at us with its talons when we approached. This aggression resulted in a painstaking few weeks for us to endure while the hawk was kept in rehabilitation until we were finally able to release it again. This was a rewarding occasion, almost bringing tears of joy to the truck driver's eyes!

Incredible will to survive

Many birds that get brought into us come in spring, especially orphaned fledglings that are blown out of their nests or caught by cats when they first venture out from their nests. Many of these baby birds are badly



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injured and can be difficult to pull through.

A favourite and some of the most resilient babies that come in are waxeyes. They are charming little green birds that flit around in the bush eating fruit and bugs. Their little eggs are tiny and hatchlings are pink, blind and hardly bigger than the tip of a finger, but they have such an incredible will to survive. One of our wonderful volunteers and her family raised a menagerie of different birds one spring and named them Jack Sparrow, Sirius Blackbird and Hank the waxeye.

Some species of birds are amazingly intelligent – like kaka, one of our native parrots. One such bird was brought in for care as it had been found on the side of the road emaciated and dehydrated. We provided veterinary care and it made a steady recovery, and once it was stable it went out to our volunteer Sue for rehabilitation.

Sue provided the kaka with a smorgasbord of food every day, and as it grew stronger it not only devoured its food more consistently, it also trashed its cage, ripping up everything in sight.

The day came for the kaka's release and Sue released it from her property. For weeks afterwards on the odd day she would walk outside to find the kaka paying a visit to her property with a number of other kaka. She mused at how the kaka clan probably heard from her inmate that the food at her joint was particularly good and that they should all go along and check it out! 🦜



Dr Liza Schneider is an internationally acclaimed author and speaker, the director of the award-winning Holistic Vets clinic in Tauranga, and a founding trustee of the ARRC Wildlife Trust

www.drliza.co.nz