

She hopes to be able to make the transition to working on the charity full time in the near future and tells me that this will allow her to spend more time fundraising and ultimately caring for a greater number of injured birds.

Their objective is very clear: rehabilitation and release. Karen explains that if a bird is not going to recover from its injuries to a point where it can be released back into the wild and thrive then they will sometimes have to make the very tough decision to euthanise it. "Nobody warned me about that, it's the hardest part of the job."



Bryan goes on to add, "When we've released a bird back into its environment safely, humanely and with any welfare issues mitigated, then that's our job done. We don't want to keep birds here, we've not built a permanent aviary, it's a rehabilitation centre. It's all about the rehabilitation. We want to get them released as quickly as possible, that really is their best chance."

"And the release is one of the best parts of it all," says Karen, "One of our volunteers just released some silvereyes that we'd been looking after. He said it was like a party popper going off when they came out of the cage. I wish I could have been there to see it."

The centre sometimes receives an influx of a particular species of bird depending on the time of year and the conditions that can affect them. It's fairly well known that when there are lots of fruiting berries on the trees the kereru can become intoxicated and clumsy but Bryan tells me that when the weather starts to heat up, the moreporks will be attracted to the hot tar seal on the roads where they forage for large moths such as the puriri moth and that this can lead to them being struck by cars.

In the spring and early summer, smaller birds including silvereyes and pīwakawaka, or fantails, are very susceptible to the sticky resin secreted by the seedpods of the parapara tree, they quickly become tangled and flightless and vulnerable to predators. Even larger birds such as owls and hawks can become injured by these trees after thinking the entrapped smaller birds represent an easy meal.

"Last November we also saw a lot of young kororā. The seasonal movement of anchovies and baitfish in the gulf was delayed just a little later than usual and this left the juveniles with much less food than normal. We saw lots of malnourished blue penguins in a very short space of time."

We walked down to the kereru aviary, kept solely for the large, colourful wood pigeons. Cross contamination and cross infection can be a problem and different birds need different things from a shelter. Karen explains that a harrier or an owl could destroy this aviary in minutes and injure themselves even further in the process.

A third of all the birds they receive for rehabilitation are kereru, and of these, almost all of them are suffering from some sort of trauma or impact injury.

"It is so important that we do our best to rehabilitate every single one of those kereru that comes in. They're far more important to the wider ecology of the island than I could ever have imagined.

"They plant almost every native tree that we have here through seed dispersal, and with some of those natives, we don't even know how to artificially propagate them. The kereru really are a key species for the ecology of this island," Karen says.

We make our way from here into an outbuilding that houses the critical care area, the ICU of the rescue centre, where another pigeon that has flown into a window is being closely monitored and assessed for any neural damage.

On a day as miserable as this outside, the warmth in here is welcome. We all squeeze into a tiny workspace intended for just

*Left – Vital fluids for a silvereye. Below – a hungry kingfisher. Right – A pair of silvereyes rescued from a parapara tree, and bottom right – A rare Cooks Petrel on its release*



one person and Bryan tells me "This is the area where the birds are first assessed and treated, it's a bit like the triage at any hospital and it's where we address the most vital needs like fluids, sugars and getting their temperature back up, which is why we keep it so nice and warm in here."

Hydration is incredibly important in the recovery and rehabilitation of the birds and Karen illuminates something that I had never thought of before.

"Unless the birds are given the right sort of water bowl they just won't be able to take any of it in. A kingfisher for example

needs a deep enough bowl, it needs to be able to get its whole beak in there. And similarly, if a bird can't stretch to its full height then it won't be able to swallow. Birds lack the neck muscles and reflexes that a mammal has so in order to be able to get that water down, they need to be able to tip their heads back."



Bryan likens it to having two broken arms and having a cup of tea put down in front of you.

We humans are clearly the biggest threat to native birds on the island. As architectural styles have changed over the years, there has been a shift towards much larger windows and glass balustrades and they account for almost all of those impact injuries that we see on the pigeons.

But what can we do about this? Karen shows me packets of cling static stickers that Forest and Bird have produced. They are simple, non-permanent decals designed to break up the clear glass space just enough to make the birds change the course of their flight. Springtime, right now, is a key period for this as newly fledged pigeons learn the physics of flight and the geography of the gardens that they live in and around.

But with humans come predators such as pet cats and dogs and the rats and stoats that have also followed us from the northern hemisphere.

Dogs will frequently attack penguins out of some misguided sense of play and Bryan points out that many of the dog toys that we give to our puppies look just like the baby penguins that we see around the shores of the island.

American writer Abigail Tucker, author of the *New York Times* bestselling book about cats, *The Lion In The Living Room* has highlighted New Zealand as being particularly vulnerable to the effects of a large population of both domesticated and feral cats.

"A remote island like New Zealand shouldn't really have cats on it at all, without human intervention they would never have made it here and the birdlife has undoubtedly suffered. Your cat doesn't even have to be a killer because just the presence of a cat in an avian ecosystem can change that environment, change breeding habits and introduce diseases and parasites like toxoplasmosis."



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