

But the cat is literally out of the bag and a cat free country is an impossibility, so what is a practical approach?

“If you catify your home, give them all the things that they need like climbing spaces, perches and materials for them to claw at then you’re removing the need for them to stray very far. If they’re not outside as much then they’ll come into contact with birdlife even less and that will mean more birdlife.”

She goes on to mention some other measures such as adding a bell to their collar and keeping them indoors at dawn and the early morning while birds are most active in their search for food and in the springtime when baby birds are hatching and fledging and are naturally very vulnerable.

Like me, Bryan and Karen are both cat and dog lovers, and I ask them if it is hard to reconcile this with the damage that they have the potential to do to our native bird life. Once again it’s just down to responsible pet ownership such as training our dogs well, especially on the beaches here with our vulnerable little blue penguin population.

They tell me that weekends and the summertime are the busiest time for the rescue centre because more people are outside enjoying themselves and this means that any injured birds are far more likely to be seen.



Above – Caring for wild birds is not without its dangers, the sharp end of a hawk. Left – a malnourished baby little blue penguin.



with their long, sharp bills.

First, make sure that the bird is actually injured and is in need of help, then capture the bird by throwing a large towel or blanket over it. Use the blanket to keep its wings by its side and the head covered, carefully place the bird and towel into a ventilated cardboard box and transport it to a veterinary clinic or call the rescue centre as soon as you can.

“Don’t give them any food or water and keep any pets well away from them.” Karen advises, “Just keep it warm and quiet, make sure you’re handling it safely and give us a call as soon as possible.

“We’re on call 24 hours a day here and it’s much better to get a call as soon as a bird has been found rather than waiting until the next morning or after the weekend.”

Birds are hugely affected by the stresses of human contact during any rescue and treatment and this can affect them in many ways, from the loss of flight feathers to complete collapse.

Bryan tells me that stress is a killer for small birds and he explains that, as with any medical emergency, there is a golden hour for the critical response, especially so with birds because their metabolic rate is that much higher than other animals.

They can lose condition incredibly fast and if their temperature falls too far, they simply cannot feed or look after themselves which only serves to exacerbate any difficulties they’re already having, he says.

My visit just serves to show me how delicate and specific the needs of these little creatures are and how glad I am that there

are people dedicated to that care when it is needed the most. The island is all the more richer for having both the birdlife that we do and the people who look after it on our behalf.

If you find an injured bird during business hours, please take it to one of the veterinary clinics on the island who will assess it and arrange its care and rehabilitation with Karen.

If you find an injured bird in the evening or at the weekend, please contact Karen at Native Bird Rescue directly by phoning 020 473 9464, emailing nbrwaiheke@gmail.com or by sending a message to their Facebook page.

The best way to help Waiheke’s Native Bird Rescue is with donations to Kiwi Bank 38-9017-0765887-00. Fundraising volunteers are also needed and if you can help with either of these things, please contact Karen Saunders. ■

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