

# HOW TO MEND A KEA

+ OTHER FABULOUS FIX-IT TALES  
FROM WILDBASE HOSPITAL

JANET HUNT



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## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

This book is in three sections. Part 1, 'Hello there, Wildbase', is a small introduction to the wildlife hospital and the people who work in it as well as to the wider conservation community.

Part 2, 'How to mend a kea', follows one animal's Wildbase story. Each patient is different, from the tiniest frog to the largest seabird, and even though there are so many things to go wrong — accidents, breakages, illness, starvation, infection — and so many body parts to potentially be affected — heads, blood, bones, organs, bills, flippers, feathers, feet — similar processes are followed. Every day at the hospital has a basic pattern, and every case traces a similar trajectory from illness to health. We glimpse a little of these through Kea's story.

Part 3, 'Washing, cleaning, breaking, mending, stitching & feeding', adds a selection of 11 more case histories, beginning with the largest, the 2011 emergency response to the grounding of the MV *Rena*, and ending with snapshots to give some idea of the great range of patients cared for at Wildbase.

Through them, in total, you will have some idea of the extent and variety of patients and cases that pass through Wildbase. Some don't have happy endings, but the majority do: the team likes to say that there's nothing better than seeing the *tail end* of their patients, as they go out the door back to their homes.



Many of the images in this book come from the Wildbase collection. Some have been taken by Dave, Massey University's photographer, using the best of gear; others have been taken with cellphones — after all, medicine, not publishing, is the aim. Some of the photos go onto the Wildbase Facebook page. Long after you have finished reading this book, you can keep up with the happenings at the hospital by checking it out. *Go, Wildbase!*

PART 1

# HELLO THERE, WILDBASE



INTRODUCTIONS

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## WHAT IS WILDBASE?

**W**ildbase is the hospital for sick and injured native animals from all over New Zealand. It is part of the Institute of Veterinary, Animal and Biomedical Sciences at Massey University in Palmerston North. It is also a training hospital for vets, wildlife technicians and nurses.

The hospital was opened in 2002. For 15 years it was located in a very small, crowded space in the veterinary school, but in early 2017 it moved to a new clinic that is 10 times larger. The rooms are clean and bright and include a surgery, an intensive care ward, holding wards named after native trees, different types and sizes of cages and a meeting room.

The hospital also now has its own vehicle (below), a wildlife ambulance sponsored by Toyota and Fly Palmy. The ambulance makes life easier when the team needs to pick up and deliver patients around town and to the airport.

The hospital building: Wildbase is on the ground floor on the left.



**T**wo kinds of native animal come to Wildbase. ('Animal' means birds as well as creatures such as mammals and reptiles.)

### 1 • RARE AND ENDANGERED NATIVE ANIMALS

The New Zealand Threat Classification System ranks species that are in danger of dying out. Sometimes there are hardly any of the species left, like kākāpō or takahē. These animals come from all over the country, often by air, occasionally from as far away as Stewart Island, the subantarctic islands or the Chathams. (There's a list of New Zealand Threat Classification categories on page 62 of this book.)

### 2 • COMMON NATIVE ANIMALS

These are the ones we often see in our daily lives — creatures like tūi, piwakawaka (fantail), kererū, pūkeko and the harrier hawk. They come to Wildbase from Manawatū, Taranaki and Hawke's Bay, but no further.

The 'commons' are treated because they are part of the Wildbase world. They are often similar to their more rare and endangered relatives: pūkeko are like takahē, and harriers are like falcons, for instance. This means that while Wildbase is helping a local bird, the team is also learning and practising skills for working with those super-endangered, really precious creatures. The hospital also cares for a few other non-native birds and the occasional pet reptile.



It's a mix: rare and endangered native species are side-by-side with common native species.

[1] Kererū (common); [2] Otago skink (rare/endangered); [3] morepork (common); [4] kiwi (rare/endangered); [5] Antipodes Island parakeet chick (rare/endangered); [6] green turtle (rare/endangered).



# MEET THE TEAM

At Wildbase there are always at least two people working with the animals.

- ★ **DUTY VET** Four vets work on a roster so there is always at least one at the clinic.
- ★ **WILDLIFE TECHNICIANS** There are three, who also work on a roster.
- ★ **TRAINEES** Most times there are student vets, technicians and nurses present in the hospital, getting useful experience, watching and learning, helping out, preparing food, feeding the animals, giving medication and cleaning up.



The Wildbase team in the operating theatre on the day of the opening of the new hospital, 27 January 2017.



## TALK TO ME

Just as in a sports team, everyone has a part to play and it's critical that they share information and help one another. There must be no mix-ups, especially when there are several of the same species in the hospital at the same time.

- ★ **WHITEBOARDS** These are dotted around the clinic. They tell the team:
  - which animal is in, what's wrong with it and where it is (which cage, in which ward)
  - what's happening each day
  - what's on the menu for each animal (the whiteboard in the kitchen)
- ★ **PAPER NOTES** Handwritten records on a clipboard follow each patient. They record details such as why it's in hospital, what treatment it's receiving, and what it eats. Each animal has a unique number.
- ★ **COMPUTER** Handwritten notes are transferred to the computer every day along with information such as X-rays.
- ★ **MEETINGS** There's a weekly team get-together to discuss what's happening with patients. There are also daily talks and conversations to share information and to continue to improve the skills of the team.



- 1 Helping hands: a harrier hawk with a fractured wing being anaesthetised.
- 2 Trainee vets Jasmine and Eva work together to 'crop tube' a kereru. The tube delivers food or liquid down the bird's throat directly into the first part of its digestive system (the crop).



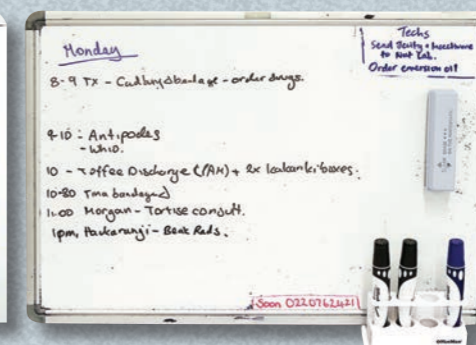
## PATIENT RECORD + MEDS



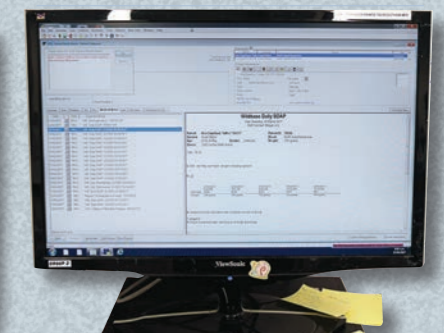
## MENU

Room	Species/Name	Diet	Prescription	FE
	Kereru	100g mix BID		1
	Whio	Kereru mix, lent, pellets, blood worms		1
	Harrier	1 chick c/w		1
	Kiwi Hakurangi	80g rom 200g pm		1
	A.I. Parakeet	Parrot seed + Kereru mix		1
	Teau	pellets + Kereru mix BID		1
	Kea/Kaka	various of fruits/veg/food/pellets		2
PP	'Gobury' Cotah (PP)	seed/pellets + fruit/veg		1

## DAILY PLANNER



## DIGITAL RECORD



## WORK WITH ME

Does the thought of helping endangered creatures inspire you? Would you like to work in a place like Wildbase?

There are many options open to you, but be warned! The numbers of jobs in this field are limited and lots of people want them. You're going to have to be the best!

- ★ **WILDLIFE VETERINARIAN** You could first train at Massey for a degree in veterinary science, and then specialise in caring for wildlife. It takes five years to become a vet.
- ★ **WILDLIFE TECHNICIANS** You could train at Massey for a degree in veterinary technology, and then specialise in caring for wildlife. It takes three years to become a vet tech.

For either of these positions, you need to be a whizz at science, be patient and good with animals *and* with people, be observant, organised, a fantastic communicator, and physically fit and strong. Working with animals is challenging and can be hard — but don't let that put you off. It can also be immensely satisfying.

The good news is that even if you don't end up working at Wildbase, your skills will be welcome in many other places, including the Department of Conservation and New Zealand's many wildlife sanctuaries. 🐦



Eva Laing is a recently qualified vet from Scotland who spent some time helping out and observing at Wildbase after she had finished her training. Brett Gartrell, the Wildbase director, is showing her around one of the Antipodes Island parakeets.

## COMINGS & GOINGS

Sick and injured creatures are sent to Wildbase by:

- ★ **THE GENERAL PUBLIC** Individuals, schools and organisations such as Forest & Bird who come across hurt wildlife.
- ★ **VET CLINICS & THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION (DOC)** Vet clinics and DOC are the first places most people go when they have wild animals in distress. Sometimes DOC people pass hurt animals to the vet. *Everyone links up with everyone else. It's a huge network.*
- ★ **BIRD RESCUE CENTRES** Sometimes they look after wild creatures themselves with the help of the local vet. And sometimes they send patients on to Wildbase.
- ★ **WILDLIFE PARKS & SANCTUARIES** Some are on this country's many offshore islands, like Kāpiti, Tiritiri Matangi or Hauturu, while a growing number are mainland islands such as Zealandia; some are open to the public, others are off-limits. All of them care for and breed rare and endangered New Zealand wildlife and need to call on Wildbase at times.

When a patient is well enough to leave Wildbase, but not quite ready to be released in the wild, it will go back to the people who sent it to the hospital, as long as they have facilities and are able to care for it.

If not, it might go to a halfway house, a dedicated recovery and rehabilitation centre, such as . . .

### BIRD RESCUE AT TURAKINA

The Whanganui-Manawatū Bird Rescue Centre at Turakina has cared for birds for over 30 years. It's run by volunteers and funded by op-shop sales and by donations. It does a great job, working with Wildbase to help over 1000 birds a year.

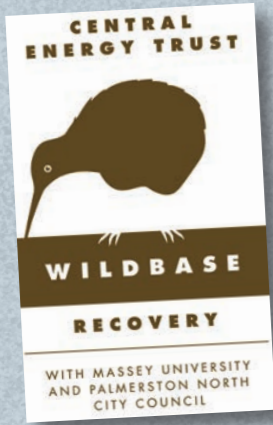
Aviaries and pens of all shapes, materials and sizes are dotted around a grassy, reedy paddock. They contain birds such as kiwi, kererū, morepork, tūi and harrier hawks, all in varying stages of repair. And a talkative magpie!

The manager, Dawne Morton, has dedicated her life to the birds. She knows the history of each one and is expert at judging when they are ready to be returned to the places they came from.



*Who, me?* A morepork with a damaged bill at Bird Rescue, Turakina.





## THE CENTRAL ENERGY TRUST WILDBASE RECOVERY CENTRE

It doesn't exist yet, but plans and fundraising are under way for a national wildlife recovery centre that will replace the aviaries on the Esplanade in Palmerston North with a specially designed, world-class rehabilitation centre.

The new facility will be owned by Palmerston North City Council and operated in partnership with Massey University.

Like the Bird Rescue Centre in Turakina, the recovery centre will take patients when they are ready to leave the hospital and give them time to gain weight and fully recover strength before they are released.

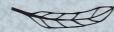
Because it's so close to the hospital, animals and staff will be able to move easily between the two.

The recovery centre will also be a major visitor attraction, a place where the public can view recovering patients without disturbing them, as well as being a destination with special programmes for school groups.

The first sod was turned in April 2017 and all going well, the centre will be up and running by 2018.



The harrier enclosure at Bird Rescue, Turakina. Circular aviaries are a good way to exercise these jittery high fliers without giving them so much space they get up speed and crash.



PART 2

# HOW TO MEND A KEA



PATIENT #78129, WILDBASE 2017

