

New Zealand opens first 'kiwi hospital' for injured birds

February 23 2024, by Ryland JAMES



Roughly 26,000 brown kiwi, once classified as "nationally vulnerable", now live in the wild across New Zealand.

New Zealand on Friday opened its first hospital exclusively treating kiwi birds, and vets have already nursed the first patient back to health—a chick nicknamed "Splash" that tumbled into a swimming pool.

Rising numbers of the once-threatened national bird have led to the construction of a purpose-built facility in Kerikeri, a three-hour drive north of Auckland.

The Department of Conservation told AFP the new [kiwi](#) hospital is the first of its kind in New Zealand.

The [rehabilitation center](#), built by local conservation group Kiwi Coast, is in the heart of the Northland region, which has a brown kiwi population of nearly 10,000.

Roughly 26,000 brown kiwi live in the wild across New Zealand—a thousand more than in 2008, when conservationists classed them "Nationally Vulnerable".

The species is now listed as "Not Threatened".

The population growth is mostly due to [conservation groups](#) culling predators like stoats and ferrets, while dog owners have been offered special courses to teach pets not to attack the flightless bird.

With numbers climbing, Kiwi Coast co-ordinator Ngaire Sullivan said a specialist hospital was needed for sick or injured birds.

"Some will be struck by cars—the more kiwi we have, the more likely that there's going to be the odd one that needs help," she told AFP.

"We wanted to make sure stressed kiwi get the care they need."

The center treated its first patient even before Friday's official opening, when a young kiwi managed to squeeze through a fence and fall into a swimming pool filter



Kiwi bird Splash, who was found stuck in a swimming pool filter, is treated by retired vet Lesley Baigent.

"He was discovered, near death, the following morning by a builder working at a nearby site," said Sullivan.

The kiwi, which spent a few days being treated, was named "Splash" by staff before being released.

"He got his nickname as that is how he was discovered—splashing about in the filter box," said Sullivan.

"Kiwi cannot swim very well or climb out of vertical slippery-sided areas."

Before the hospital opened, injured or ill birds had to be driven at least an hour to get treatment.

"There were incidents where kiwi didn't survive the journey, which is one of the main reasons we started the center," Sullivan added.

The hospital, run by volunteers, has veterinary facilities and isolation pens, "so we don't spread diseases", Sullivan explained.

Kiwi patients will be treated for up to three months before being returned to the wild.

Sullivan says the hospital is important to keep the kiwi population healthy.

"The tide has turned for the brown kiwi," Emily King, a kiwi expert, told AFP.

The Department of Conservation technical adviser said the population growth is a result of successful predator management, "but without sustained effort, brown kiwi could easily slide back into a threatened status."

© 2024 AFP

Citation: New Zealand opens first 'kiwi hospital' for injured birds (2024, February 23) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-02-zealand-kiwi-hospital-birds.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.