



Phil doesn't recommend poison for controlling rabbits and instead advises the use of traps baited with carrot.

because they are ring-barked. The owners put on plastic cages but they climb up the plastic and eat the leaves on the top or dig underneath. Even with raised beds the nets are just like ladders."

Phil doesn't recommend using poison as there is a danger of secondary poisoning to other animals like dogs or hawks, and shooting isn't suitable in a regular garden. "You can use a live trap using bait like carrot ... you can catch, three, four or five," he says.

As part of its appeal to council, OWRS said residents were getting "discouraged" and sought action before rabbit numbers increased even more; unhampered as they are by their natural predator, feral cats, whose numbers have been significantly reduced by trapping in Whakanewha.

"Council has been proactive in encouraging Waiheke to pursue a sustainable lifestyle through its support at the Sustainability Centre and by initiating a variety of programmes to encourage residents to grow their own food," wrote OWRS secretary Robin Mossman.

"Their efforts to follow these council initiated programmes are rendered futile in the face of destruction of their crops by rabbits. This is a community which is proud of its special character and works hard to sustain it." • *Liza Hamilton*

Big dry takes toll on birdlife

The dry conditions are stretching the resources of Waiheke Native Bird rescue, with volunteers regularly working more than 12 hours a day.

And NBR's Karen Saunders is putting the call out for residents to join the crusade to help preserve local birdlife as conditions are set to worsen.

Karen predicts the warm, dry weather will move Waiheke into drought status very soon and since she's been "incredibly busy" already with her avian patients, there's plenty the rest of us can do to help alleviate the problems.

"Recently we have admitted a variety of patients suffering from the dry conditions, including a ruru/morepork that was ill and dehydrated before being hit by a car, a kererū with toxic systems and a tūi with avian pox.

"We also have a number of orphans in care, these could be due to not enough food, or they jump from the nest due to the heat. We have a baby ruru, baby kingfishers, too many baby tūi, and a couple of baby kererū."

Karen's tips for helping birdlife include:

- For large birds: use deeper bowls they can perch on and bathe in, for example casserole dishes, large flat bottomed bowls.
- For small birds and large insects: use a fairly shallow, wide container with an edge to perch on, for example an old roasting pan, ceramic quiche dishes.
- Place the container up high or in an open space, well away from shrubs or areas where cats might hide.
- Clean and disinfect the container daily before refilling it - this is very important as unwashed containers can spread diseases among birds. A quick scrub with a drop of detergent or disinfectant (remember to it rinse really well afterwards). This will save lives as we are seeing more and more



This morepork was treated after being hit by a car, but Karen Saunders says it was dehydrated before the accident.

diseases like avian pox and bacterial infections.

- Remove any stagnant water sources. Water left to sit hosts the growth of bacteria and other toxins which make our birds, lizards and insects very ill. During long, dry periods we see many birds critically ill from drinking stagnant contaminated water, this results in upset stomachs and neurotoxins, leading to dehydration, starvation and secondary incidents like vehicle strike or predation.

- If possible, keep an area of your garden - ideally somewhere with a good range of plants of various heights - well watered. If you have the water to spare, you can share it with our wildlife by having a dedicated patch you water every other evening. Or you can save your greywater and pour it in the same bushy place each day. This will create a cool, thriving oasis that will be an attraction for birds as well as our lizards and insects, which the birds will eat. Our ruru, kōtare/kingfisher, piwakawaka/fantail, riroriro/grey warbler and shining cuckoos all need healthy hydrated insects to survive, insect-eaters get much of their fluids from the food they eat. •



Karen and her volunteers have been working long shifts coping with the high number of avian patients.