

Raratoka on the mend



Raratoka is at the hospital for just over four months, but she is a challenging case. Wildbase has never had one quite like it before. How do you mend such a delicate instrument as a kiwi bill, especially when it must be used all the time for eating?

Megan coats the trimmed area with nail varnish to protect and strengthen it, but the varnish peels at the edges and an infection grows underneath. It's not working, and the bill is weakened and wobbly. The break must be held together and kept steady, but how can you do that? It's not possible to drill into the bill.

Bright idea!

Megan experiments with a technique that is sometimes used to mend turtle shells. Dress hooks are superglued on either side of the maxilla and rubber bands are looped in a figure-8 pattern to gently pull the break together. This is innovative, scary and exciting. It has never before been tried on a kiwi.

Will it work?

[...]

SLOWLY, PATIENTLY, the Wildbase team nurses Raratoka down the path to health. Days turn into weeks, and weeks become months. They keep Raratoka's pain levels down and encourage her to eat by herself. At the same time they keep the bill clean and healing. One nostril blocks. She has many general anaesthetics, many X-rays, many blood tests and surgeries. She still doesn't want to eat.

Her weight falls and falls, each day a little less. She must eat, but struggles so much when she is force-fed that the team has to give her liquid food by tube.

And at last she begins to turn around. Her bill heals and her weight increases. She is fed living things, such as earthworms and mealworms, and is moved from her cage into a larger space so she can move around and build up her appetite.

[...]

FInally, almost miraculously, unbelievably, Raratoka is better. She's active at night. She's partying, eating by herself and biffing things around in her room. Her bill is as mended as it's ever going to be, and she is fit and ready to return to the south of the South.