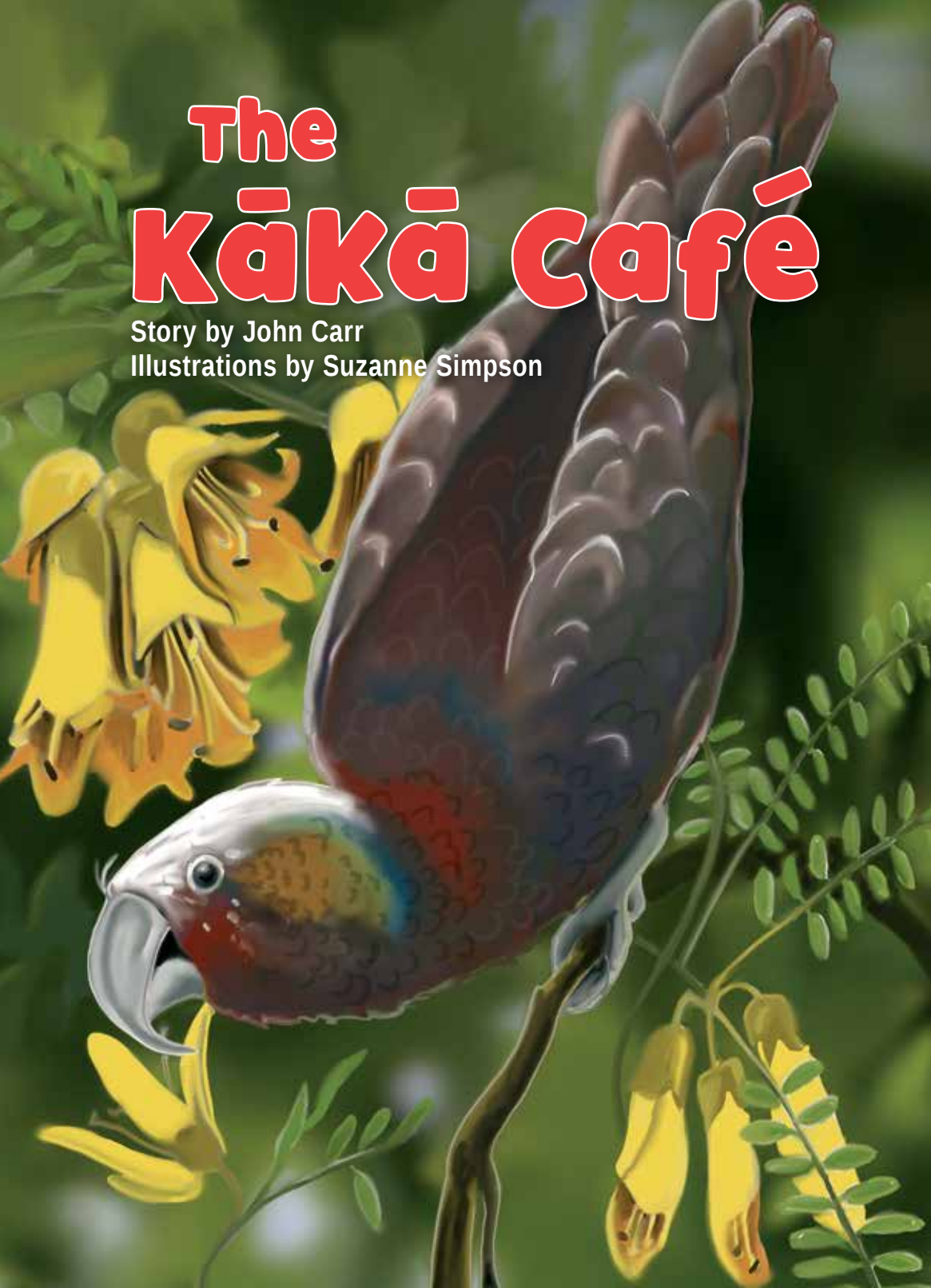


The Kākā Café

Story by John Carr

Illustrations by Suzanne Simpson



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Illustrations by Suzanne Simpson

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Chapter 1

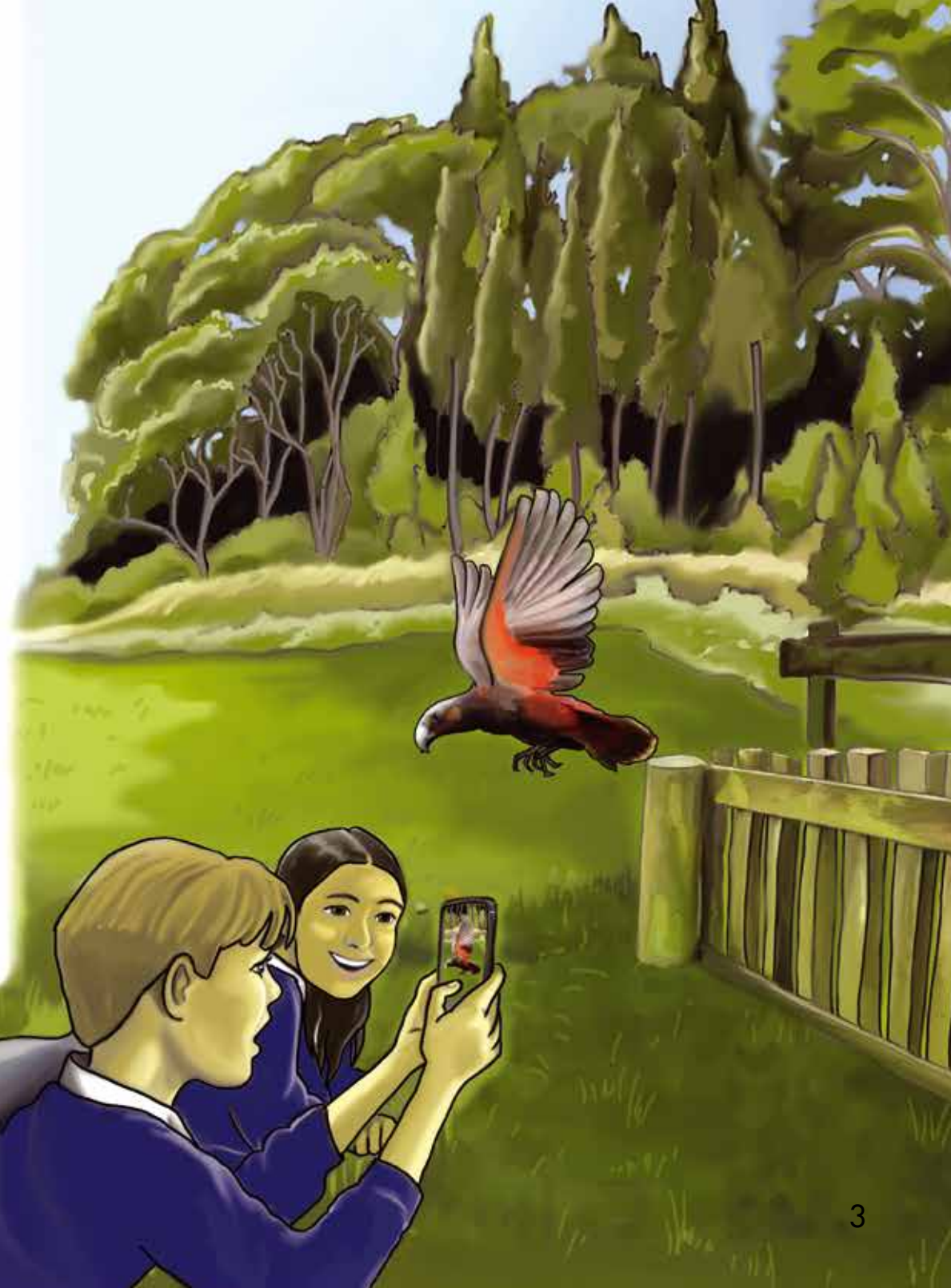
Tom crawled to the bush near the school fence. He stopped. The peanuts he had spread on the grass were working. His target had moved from the nature reserve.

The bird was now sitting on the fence. Suddenly he swooped down onto the grass. He was about ten metres away. Tom took careful aim and pressed the button.

“I got him, Maia!” he shouted. The bird fluttered into the air and flew back into the trees on the reserve. “I got him!”

Back in Room 10, Tom and Maia looked at the photos on Tom’s tablet.

“Good picture!” said Maia. “Just crop your finger out of the corner, Tom. Then it’ll be a great first slide for our presentation.”



Ms Hosking, their teacher, was excited when she saw the photo.

“I knew the nuts would attract them,” she said. “Kākā go nuts over nuts. I use nuts at home and they always come to my garden. That kākā looks perfect.”

“Not quite perfect,” said Tom. “Have a look at the beak! It’s bent.”

Tom zoomed in on the beak. The top and the bottom parts of the beak seemed to be overlapping. The beak looked different from photos of kākā on the internet.

“Oh, dear,” said Ms Hosking, “that doesn’t look right. Maybe you and Maia could send that photo to an expert. See if you can find out what is wrong with that bird.”

Nobody in Room 10 knew then that their “Native Birds” research was about to change direction.



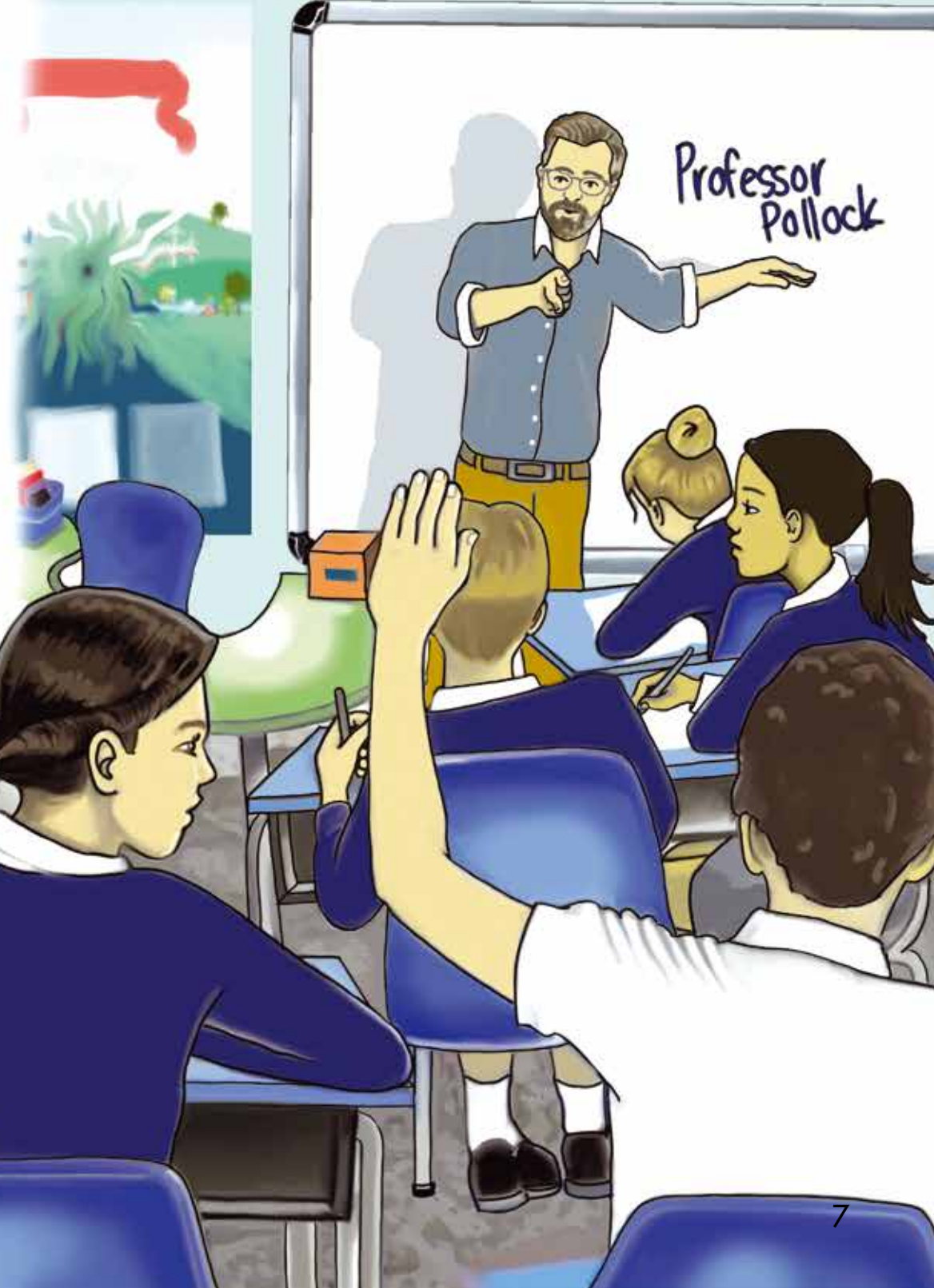
Chapter 2

“Regurgitate!” Maia liked the word, but she didn’t like the idea behind it. Adult kākā bring up their food and feed it to their chicks. This fact made her and some of her classmates squirm. It didn’t stop them listening though. They were hooked on everything Professor Pollock said.

Professor Pollock was the native bird expert who Tom and Maia had contacted about the kākā with the bent beak.

“If kākā chicks get fed regurgitated nuts and bread,” said Professor Pollock, “they can get bone disease. This can cause their beaks to deform, like the one in Tom’s photo. Kākā with deformed beaks can’t feed properly. They often die after leaving the nest. The food that causes disease in kākā comes from people,” he said.

That sent murmurs around the classroom. Ms Hosking gasped.



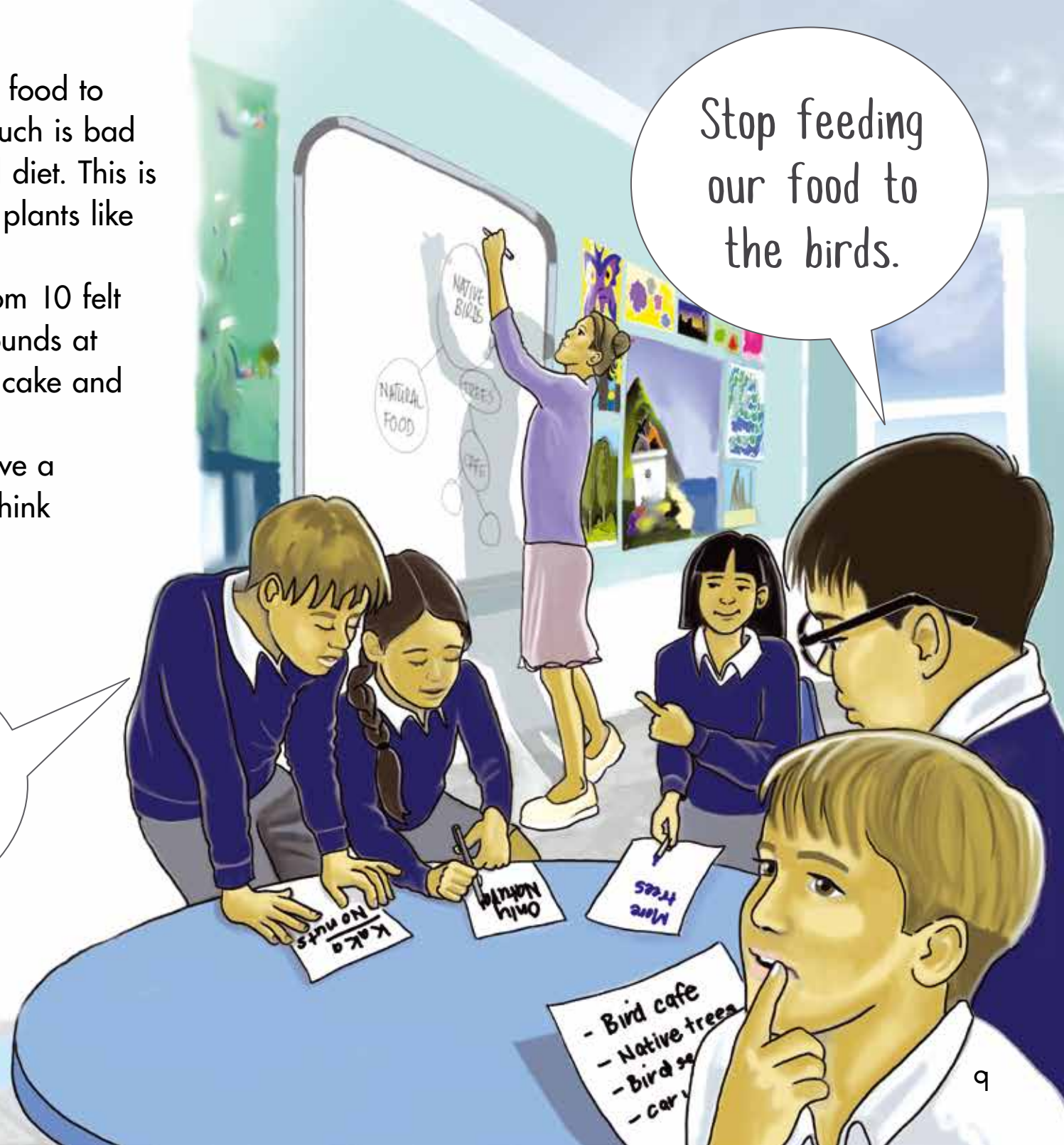
“Nuts and bread to kākā are like fast food to people,” said Professor Pollock. “Too much is bad for them. They need to eat their natural diet. This is grubs, berries, seeds and the nectar of plants like kowhai, rātā and flax.”

After Professor Pollock had gone, Room 10 felt guilty. Kākā often visited the school grounds at lunchtime. They ate lots of bread, nuts, cake and other things thrown by the children.

“Oh dear,” said Ms Hosking. “We have a problem at this school. I’m part of it. I think it’s time for a brainstorm.”

Make school
a healthy place for
the birds.

Stop feeding
our food to
the birds.



Chapter 3

Room 10's "Kākā Diet" brainstorm was massive. Every brain in the class came up with ideas. Ms Hosking had to borrow whiteboards from Rooms 9 and 11 just to list them all.

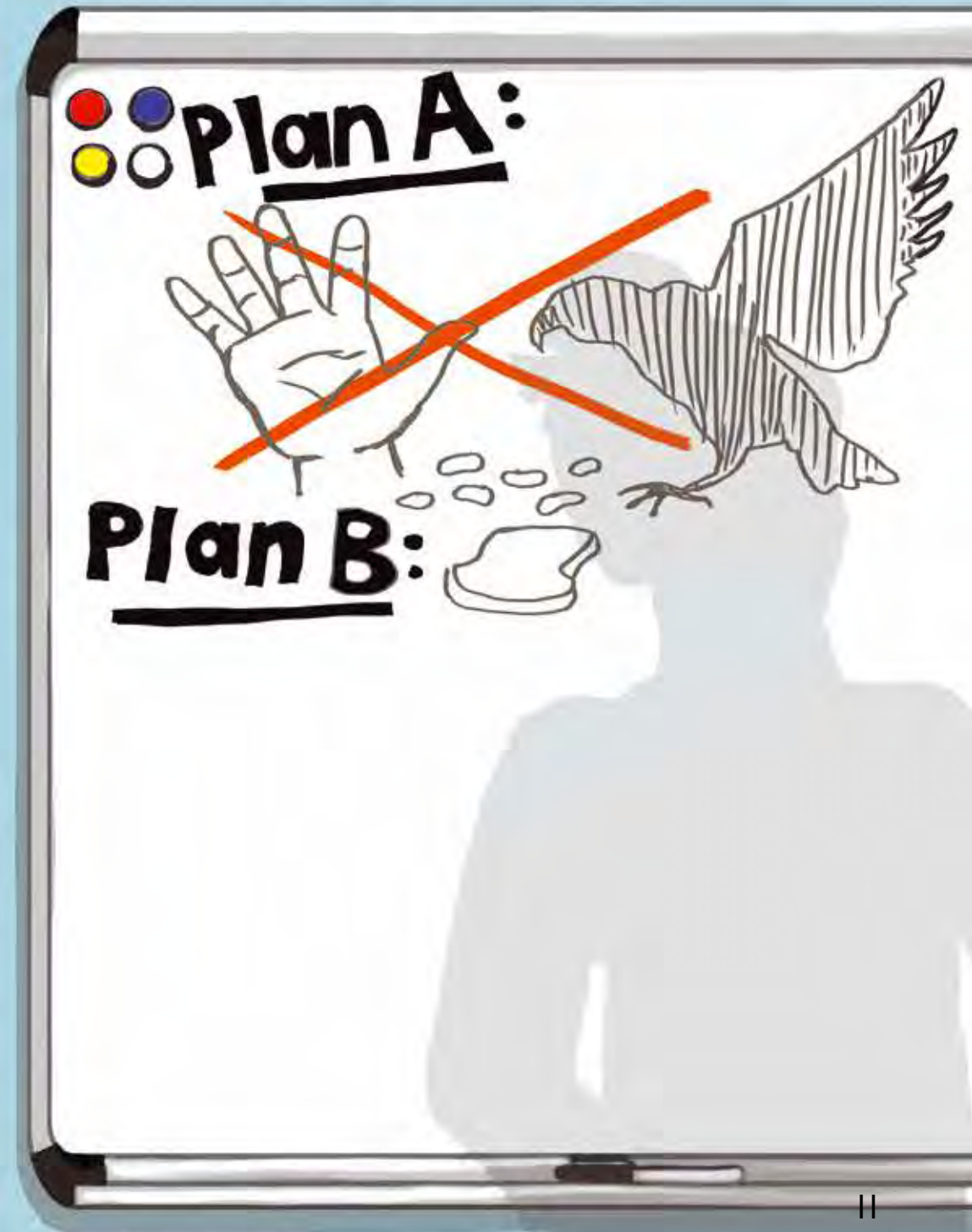
The ideas were recorded and sorted. They were grouped and graded. They were quizzed and queried, discussed or discarded. Finally, Room 10 came up with a two-part action plan.

Part A involved making sure people didn't feed human food to kākā.

"That's the easy part," said Ms Hosking. "It's all about education. We're a school and that's what we do."

Part B was finding a reason for kākā to visit when there was no more bread and nuts.

"That is going to be more difficult," said Ms Hosking. "For that, we are going to need the principal, Mr Porter, on our side."



Chapter 4

Mr Porter was in good form when he came to listen to Room 10's ideas for a Kākā Café. Tom and Maia were only two slides into their presentation when he started making jokes.

"So you want to build a café for birds on the school grounds?" he asked. "That sounds very egg-citing. Will this café have a fly-through area for hungry birds? In case they want to fly and eat!" He laughed loudly.

"No," said Maia seriously. "It's not a fast-food café. It's more like a garden filled with trees and plants. There will be fruit, nectar, seeds and berries that kākā like to eat. We want them to eat all the healthy stuff they eat naturally in the bush. They shouldn't eat the nuts and bread that make them sick."



Mr Porter looked thoughtful.

“The kākā will get used to it. I did when the tuck shop stopped selling doughnuts.” He patted his stomach. “I didn’t like it, but it was better for me. To kākā, nuts and bread are what doughnuts are to me.”

“We’ve done the research,” said Tom. “We know exactly what plants we need for the garden. Serena’s mum, who is a landscape gardener, has helped us with a planting plan.”



“Where will the café go?” Mr Porter asked.

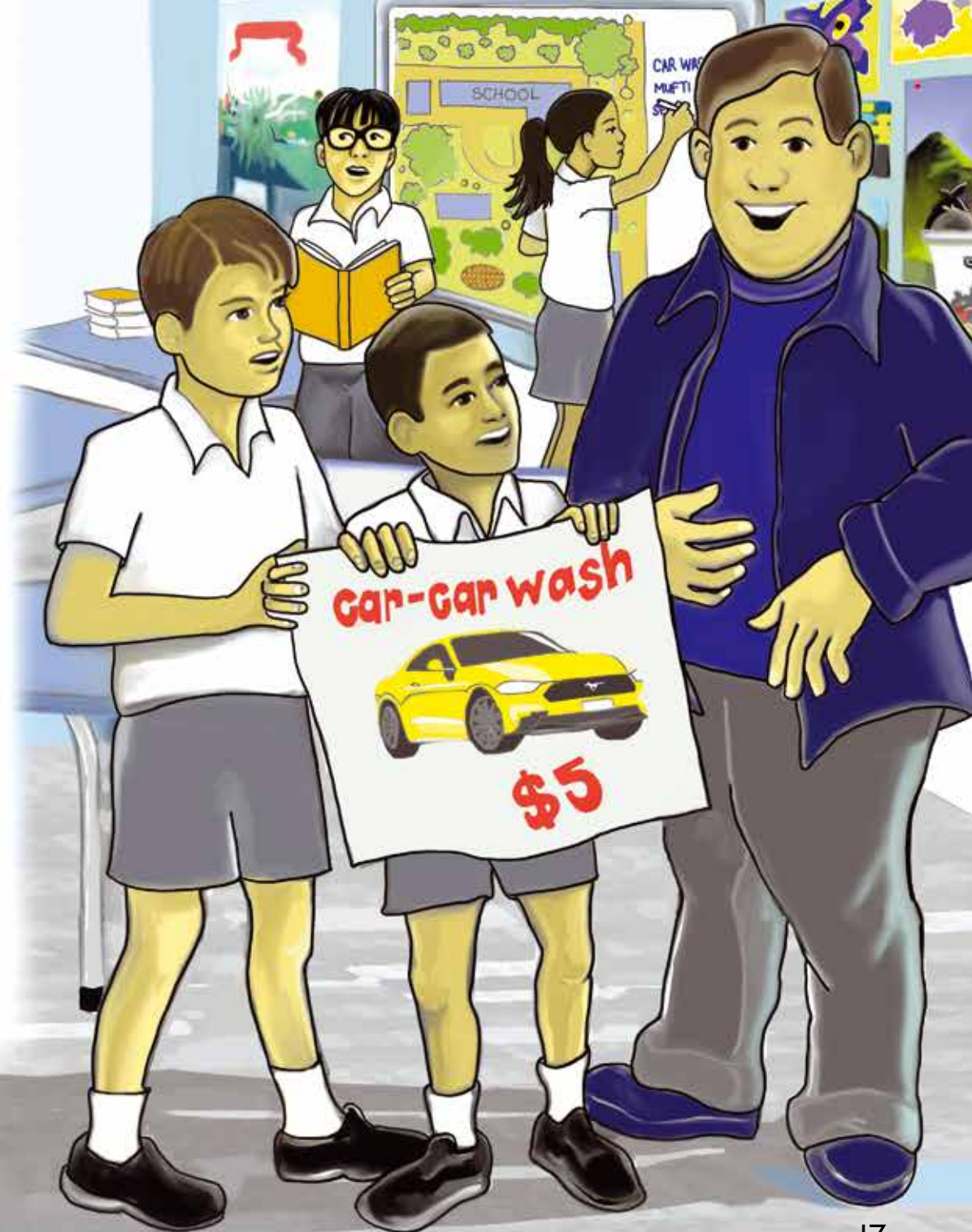
Mereta, chair of the Site Selection Committee, answered. “The northwestern corner of the school grounds,” she said. “It’s close to the nature reserve. It is sheltered. There is a water tap there. Plus it can be seen from the eating area and from your office.”

“Mmm, I like that idea, Mereta. It will be a good reminder to everyone to eat healthy natural foods, especially me. Now,” said Mr Porter, “here comes the big question. Who is going to pay for this?”

“We are,” said Charlie. “We’ll have mufti days and a second-hand book sale. We’ll wash teachers’ cars at lunchtime – \$5 a car and \$4.50 for the principal.”

“You could call it the car-car wash,” laughed Mr Porter.

“We already have,” said Charlie. “Demetri and Marcus finished the posters yesterday.”



Mr Porter smiled. “Wow! What a wonderful presentation and a fantastic idea! However, when are you going to find the time to do all the work?”

He looked around the class. None of the children spoke. This time Ms Hosking had the answer.

“We will do it in class time,” she said.

“The children have done a huge amount of brainstorming, reading, writing, researching, calculating and problem-solving. We can make this a STEAM project. Imagine how much they are going to learn about biology, horticulture, nutrition, conservation and hard work.”

Mr Porter smiled. “I can’t argue with that,” he said, and he didn’t.



Chapter 5

Eight months later, Mr Porter was in his office enjoying the view of the Kākā Café from his window. He was very proud of it. The trees and shrubs were getting bigger. He could see how wonderful it would be in a few years' time.

Already other native birds were eating at the café, as well as kākā. Every time one of the students photographed a new native bird in the café, Mr Porter gave them a book token at assembly. So far, he had photos of a kākā, a tūī, a kererū, a pīwakawaka and a wax-eye on his wall.

Mr Porter opened a large flat parcel that had arrived in the post. When he looked at what was inside, he smiled and wrote on a piece of paper.

"Mrs Stewart," he called to his deputy, "I would like you to read a message to Room 10 on the intercom."



Room 10 listened as the message came through.

“An important message for Room 10. A large moa has been sighted in the Kākā Café. Mr Porter would like someone to photograph it immediately, please.”

Ms Hoskings and the children grabbed devices and rushed outside. As they reached the Kākā Café, they didn’t see a huge flightless bird. They saw a principal sitting on a ride-on lawn mower.

“Whoops!” Mr Porter laughed as the children gathered around. “Did Mrs Stewart’s message sound like moa? It was meant to be mower.”

He held up a large framed certificate.

“Room 10,” he said, “because of your efforts, the school has won an environmental award for the Kākā Café, plus money to make it even better! I think you deserve a day trip to a conservation reserve and a free lunch!” he added.

As the clapping and cheering died down, Ms Hosking added, “Without doughnuts.”



Land Bird Facts and Tips

Help protect New Zealand's precious birds by sharing these facts and tips with your friends, family, classmates and teachers.

- To find out more facts and tips about land birds, get involved with the New Zealand Garden Bird Survey. This fun citizen science project helps gather valuable information about New Zealand's garden birds and their distribution across Aotearoa. Go to www.landcareresearch.co.nz for information.
- Planting native trees, shrubs and climbers can provide nectar, seeds, berries and shelter for birds all year round.
- Eco-sourced plants are plants that naturally occur in your area. The cool thing about them is that native wildlife has adapted to using these plants as a food source over thousands of years. Your garden centre or plant nursery should be able to provide you with more information about eco-sourced plants.
- Avoid planting too close to windows. The reflections on windows can confuse birds, causing them to accidentally fly into the glass, leading to painful and even fatal injuries.
- Keeping your garden well-watered and leaving some areas of leaf litter will help keep the soil moist and attract a wide range of insects which birds such as fantail (pīwakawaka), grey warbler (riroriro) and silvereye (tauhou) can eat.
- If you have a large tree that birds like to nest in, ask an adult to trim the lower branches. This makes it a little more difficult for predators to climb.

Visit kids.spcaeducation.org.nz to learn more about caring for wildlife.