

# Farewell to a fishy visitor

By STUART WHITAKER

THE Poll family, visiting New Zealand from England, have had to endure two tearful farewells in less than a week.

On Monday, the family flew back to England after an extended stay with family at Mount Maunganui.

But last Tuesday they said farewell to the little blue penguin they rescued from near certain death in January.

On the Mount beach, just east of Leisure Island, Astrid Poll and her cousin Frankie Berardino spotted something in the shallow surf. It was an injured little blue penguin, struggling to make its way back out to sea.

"But it just kept getting washed back in by the waves," says mum Tanya.

With the assistance of a boogie board, the family managed to rescue the penguin and bring it to shore, before taking it home in a box.

A week or so earlier, the family had found an injured petrel on the beach and had been put in touch with Chrissy Jefferson of ARRC — the Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre — in Oropi.

The petrel didn't survive and there were fears the penguin may have been about to suffer the same fate.

"It didn't look good — there was a lot of blood," says Tanya.

The children named the penguin Kiki before handing her care over to Chrissy's healing hands.

The rescue was in January, and last week the good Samaritans were rewarded as Kiki made her first tentative flipper strokes out to the open sea, before quickly gaining confidence to tackle the surf around the rocks alongside Mauao's base track.

Before long Kiki was out of view.

Chrissy says the penguin was young and had probably come ashore for its first moult, when she fell prey to a gull or gulls.

She says there was also



CHRISSEY Jefferson holds Kiki prior to her release watched by (left to right) Frankie Berardino, Oscar Poll and Astrid Poll. Insert: Kiki begins her journey back out to sea.

evidence of fishhook damage to a flipper.

"They take three to four weeks to moult and don't feed during that time because they aren't waterproof so they can't get back into the water — they are so very, very vulnerable," says Chrissy.

Efforts before that focus on putting on body fat to survive the time without food.

"She was like a little Buddha when we got her here.

"I went through moult with her, and fed her as well, which is why she is in such good condition now."

Kiki weighed around 1.2kg, well over the average 850gm.

"She needs to get out there swimming to lose some weight," says Chrissy.

Chrissy has a second little blue penguin, also brought to her injured, that she thinks may have been hit by a surfboard and seems to have developed an aversion for water, but is otherwise gaining health.

"It's very pleasing because they are very, very hard to rear, so I am quite pleased we've got them to such good condition."

Problems can occur if the penguins refuse to eat.

"At beginning, if you can't force feed them and they won't take it, then you have to make a fish smoothie — and that's as horrible looking as it sounds — and literally force feed them with it."

With Kiki, however, there were no such problems and she happily

ate squid, pilchards and anchovies.

"I had to open her beak, but then there were no problems."

Chrissy says the release is a pretty special time.

"The best thing about rehabilitation is when you actually release them — and penguins are really special because you don't get many of them."

ARRC is a charitable trust run on donations and volunteer time that has no connection with the SPCA.

It has an aviary in Oropi that opened in October last year.

■ Anyone interested in providing financial assistance can call Chrissy for more information on 543 1116.