

# Moa makes a comeback

THE Moa may be down, but it's certainly not out.

Despite being hunted to extinction by Maori about 500 years ago, the giant prehistoric relative of the Kiwi is about to reappear in Rotary Park, opposite the Otorohanga Kiwi House, as New Zealand's first virtual bird 'living' in the world's first virtual bird park.

The return of the Moa – or a life-sized 3D digital version of it – is being made possible by an application (app) downloadable to a smart device such as a tablet or mobile phone.

Otorohanga Zoological Society president Jo Russell says the potential tourist attraction to boost the kiwi house's popularity was hatched by district councillor Roger Brady and Auckland software company Augview's development manager Melanie Langlotts.

"Statistics show most people aged 15-65 years have a suitable smart digital device and we expect 50% of visitors will download the walking, squawking, stalking kiwi house Moa app as added value to their kiwi house and bird park admission," says Ms Langlotts.

As further levels of "gaming" – such as an attacking Haast Eagle or interactive Kiwi – are added, it is envisaged the app will generate its own revenue stream.

When the current prototype is released users will be able to wander in Rotary Park interacting with seven Moa in a parallel virtual world, through their device's smart camera system.

Ms Langlotts says the cutting edge technology uses GPS co-ordination to position a 3D world into the real space the user moves around in, allowing people to interact with the Moa, walk up to them, follow them around, or run away from them when stalked.

"If a visitor walks up to a Moa, the distance will trigger it to react at

some stage," she says.

"It may look down in a friendly way, or it may be an adult female with a young chick and programmed to attack because it feels fear."

The virtual North Island Giant Moa prototype female has been created with advice from Moa expert Trevor Worthy ('she' is named Trevette after the paleozoologist) and kiwi house wildlife manager Lizzy Perrett.

## AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

"We didn't want a Disneyland experience," says Ms Perrett.

"Our Moa is authentic, down to the length of every bone, and its behaviour is precisely modelled on that of other ratites like the Cassowary and Emu."

Otorohanga District Development Board funded the \$12,000 prototype.

"The project will have huge spin-offs for the community," says board member Liz Cowan.

"It will create ongoing funding for our premier tourism icon, attract more visitors to our town and keep them here longer.

"But there is also an important underlying ecological message here.

"The Moa app brings into sharp focus what we've lost, so let's protect the precious species we still have."

Mrs Cowan says the board also sees the benefits of growing a digital industry sector in Otorohanga.

Among these benefits are educational opportunities for local students.

Otorohanga College has committed to creating unit standards so students can gain qualifications in 3D graphic design and computer programming, while Otorohanga South School year 7 and 8 students will learn basic programming and 3D animation on entry-level software.

Mrs Russell says the first priority is to raise \$5000 by August 31, from public donations to a Kickstarter seed money webpage for seed money.



**VIRTUAL REALITY:** Augview reality software development manager Melanie Langlotts (left) and Otorohanga Zoological Society president Jo Russell with the prototype 3D virtual walking, squawking, stalking Moa.

"As of yesterday we were almost halfway towards that goal with 64 people generously pledging \$2575.

"Once that's in the bag, it demonstrates the community is behind us, and we can secure funding to purchase the Augmented Reality virtual platform needed to get the Moa off the ground.

"We must reach that \$5000 goal so we can register the app and get it released. We desperately need our community to show its support."

To pledge your donation to the Kickstarter Campaign to bring back the Moa – go to [kiwihouse.org.nz](http://kiwihouse.org.nz) or [kickstarter.com/projects/the\\_moisagoer](http://kickstarter.com/projects/the_moisagoer).

## WDC tightens up signage rules

NON-COMPLIANT advertising signs in the Waitomo district are drawing unwanted attention.

With the number of tourists visiting the district increasing, so too are advertising and marketing signs along local roads and state highways.

Waitomo District Council's District Plan allows signage as a discretionary activity. Signs can only be erected if resource consent is obtained.

Roadside advertising signs or 'hoardings' are becoming a more common sight, and a council assessment has shown a large number do not have consent. District-wide, there are 70 signs erected without any form of authorisation from WDC with 25 on SH3 between Hangatiki and Piopio, and 21 on SH37 between Hangatiki and Waitomo.

WDC communications officer Kelly Marriott says the majority of signs are located adjacent to the state highway network in rural areas.

"Lack of enforcement of District Plan conditions is a major concern for the council," she says.

"To address this issue, we are contacting the local businesses that have non-complying signs and outlining the relevant provisions."

Signs that are identified as needing to be removed, or that require an approved resource consent application will be discussed with business owners before action is taken.

The New Zealand Transport Agency will also be involved in the discussions regarding signs situated along state highways.

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