

New look for pioneer Kiwi House

By Nikki Preston

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The North Island brown kiwi family will swell when five eggs hatch next month. Photo / APN

Otorohanga's Kiwi House is getting a \$730,000 makeover to bring the tourist attraction into the 21st century.

The 40-year-old Kiwi House has received confirmation the Otorohanga District Council will guarantee a \$580,000 loan required for the renovations and expansion.

Work on the makeover will begin this year and when completed in November next year will triple the size of the 100sq m complex.

The expansion includes a new cafe, extending the retail area, new interactive exhibitions and refurbishment of existing exhibitions including the wetland area.

Kiwi House general manager Paul Stuart-Higgs said the most exciting part of the expansion was transforming the nocturnal kiwi house into a "dawn til dusk" exhibition.

"The kiwis will be the highlight of it but what that will really do is bring to life all the things that happen at night time when we are all in bed. There will be owls in there, there will be lots of interactive experiences for people to touch and feel and experience," the former Melbourne Zoo curator said.

"New Zealand after dark really. It's going to be quite an attractive incentive for people overseas to come and see it but also for the domestic market which is something we would really like to expand upon.

"I think all New Zealanders should have a chance to see the national bird."

As well as the kiwi drawcard, there would be owls, geckos and other nocturnal creatures in the display. Each group of four kiwi is on display for four hours a day so people can see the sleepy native bird moving around.

There will also be a new custom-built classroom and a new exhibition named after local conservationist Arthur Cowan's shed.

"It's a typical garden shed but inside lots of nooks and crannies and drawers that children and adults alike can open and under perspex there will be a weta and other creepy crawlies."

Last year, 41,000 people visited the Kiwi House and this is expected to rise by 5 per cent when the project is completed. Customer spending is also expected to rise by 5 per cent.

At the moment, 60 per cent of visitors come from overseas and Mr Stuart-Higgs hoped the new attractions would increase the domestic market.

The Kiwi House was also expecting a slight rise boost people coming into the country for the Rugby World Cup this month.

"We are expecting a bit of a spike in visitors there, we have already had quite a few inquiries from people in Europe and Great Britain wanting to know what is on offer."

Mr Stuart-Higgs said the ambitious expansion would bring the facility up to scratch with the world class breeding programme run at the centre.

"The original Kiwi House in New Zealand needs to regain the iconic status it had a few years ago."

The Kiwi House has two great spotted kiwi birds and 22 North Island brown kiwis in residence and another five eggs are due to hatch next month.

Mr Stuart-Higgs said people should look out for Atu the great spotted bird who was the star of the show.

"She is just amazing."

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