

# Miami zoo's meet-a-kiwi scheme ruffles feathers in New Zealand

May 24 2023, by Ryland JAMES

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A file photo of a kiwi, millions of which used to roam before Western settlers arrived on the shores of New Zealand.

New Zealand's prime minister on Wednesday joined a chorus of Kiwis complaining about the treatment of their national bird by a Miami zoo.

New Zealanders have been appalled by revelations that Zoo Miami allowed visitors to pet one of the shy nocturnal animals under harsh lights.

Zoo Miami issued an apology on Tuesday and said it had scrapped the interactive pet-a-kiwi experience, but not before videos of a kiwi named Paora being stroked and petted went viral.

"The zoo (has) immediately taken steps to address the concerns that were raised," New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said.

"They have acknowledged that what they were doing wasn't appropriate or wasn't right or wasn't fair to the kiwi," he added. "I thank them for taking it seriously."

Millions of kiwis used to roam before Western settlers arrived on the shores of New Zealand, where only around 70,000 are now left in the wild.

The Zoo Miami bird is only one of around 60 kiwis currently housed outside of New Zealand, according to the Department of Conservation.

Kiwis are part of Maori mythology in New Zealand, where there was fierce condemnation of Paora's treatment.

"It is obviously very clear your team (at Zoo Miami) is not equipped and has no clue how to care for this national treasure. Return Immediately, Paora," one person fumed on Twitter.

"Sell kiwi toys if you want to fundraise! This is unethical and cruel," wrote another user.

In a statement, Zoo Miami said the "concerns expressed have been taken

very seriously".

"Effective immediately, the Kiwi Encounter will no longer be offered," the zoo added.

"It's especially painful to all of us to think that anything that has occurred with Paora... would be offensive to any of the wonderful people of New Zealand."

The zoo said it planned to build "a special habitat" for Paora so it could teach visitors about "the amazing kiwi" without direct contact.

The Miami zoo hatched the bird, which is named after Moari iwi (tribe) leader and environmentalist Paora Haitana.

Haitana told Radio New Zealand that it was "a huge concern" to hear of his namesake's treatment.

"It's our signature, we're known as the kiwi, so it goes against everything the bird was given to them for," Haitana added.

New Zealand's Department of Conservation said it would contact Zoo Miami to "share our expertise and [high standards](#) for the respectful care of [kiwi](#)".

A spokesperson added that they also planned to raise the matter with the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, of which Zoo Miami is a member.

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