

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.

Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Kea: pp 209-211.



## KEA

**Family** Nestoridae

**Species** *Nestor notabilis*

**Common name** Kea

**Status** Endemic

**Abundance** Common in selected South Island areas

**Size** 460 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Kaka 450 mm)

**Habitat** Restricted to subalpine and alpine environments.

**New Zealand range** Found in the South Island only. They are well-spread across the Southern Alps and into much of Westland and throughout Fiordland.

**Discussion** A close relative of the Kaka and the only alpine parrot in the world. The species stems from an ancestor closer to the forest Kaka than the alpine Kea (Fleming 1982). In the past they have gone through phases of persecution by high-country farmers being blamed for killing sheep. Today, though, they are protected and numbers have increased.

## **Description**

**Upperparts and underparts** Olive-green. **Underwings** Scarlet. **Rump** Dull red.

**Tail** Has a touch of blue on longer feathers. Otherwise green.

## **Conspicuous features**

- A large green parrot.
- Has a sharp-hooked bill.
- Some yellow flecking is noticeable on body feathers.
- The red underwing is easily seen when birds are frolicking.

## **Conspicuous characteristics**

- A bird which is very confident on the ground and which is constantly clambering around and over rocks in search for food.
- Vocally noisy when in flight.

**Kea behaviour** The Kea behaves in its alpine environment in a similar comical way as does the Kaka in the forest. It is more interested in human activities than Kaka though. For example, cars parked in alpine areas are quickly investigated. Kea are known to slide down windscreens, pull on wind-screen wipers, hook on to half-open windows and peck tyre rims and valve stems. The public are warned to guard their cars in Kea localities.

**Call** The Kea screech is commonly heard in all alpine regions. It sounds like its name “kee-aaa kee-aaa kee-aa”. Usually the screech comes from above because birds tend to perch high up. It is also uttered when birds are in flight.

**Nest** In holes in the ground or under fallen logs. Up to 4 white eggs are laid.

## **Where to find – South Island**

**Marlborough** – Lake Rotoiti tracks leading from this lake into the alpine environment. P. 344.

**West Coast** – Franz Josef Glacier at car parking areas.

**Canterbury** – Arthurs Pass. P. 348.

**Fiordland** – Eglinton Valley at Cascade Creek. Also The Divide, Hollyford Valley, and the Homer Tunnel entrance. P. 370.