

highly efficient system which is guaranteed to produce a fully fledged journalist in the short space of six months by the simple method of postal lessons. Judging by his aptitude to produce the sensational, he would have been far better reporting murder cases than investigating the habits of the kea. After a long discourse on the blood-thirsty habits of this bird, absolute and conclusive proof was brought forward—a photograph of a kea with a huge lump of mutton just torn from the living sheep. It was entitled “Guilty.” *What evidence was there to be brought forward to dispute this? The photographer’s trump card, “a camera cannot lie.” No, but sometimes photographers do! It doubtless had convinced some people, but it didn’t quite convince me, for the kea was stuffed, and very badly stuffed at that!*

The journalist would possibly get £5 for his article and a unique photograph, and the case against the bird was again strengthened. So after all the kea is a good commercial proposition for some people. Talking about that reminds me of a little story which I heard from a one-time gold prospector. A few years ago when seeking the precious metal in the most southerly part of New Zealand, he came across a professional kea hunter, where there were no sheep or likely to be any. He told the prospector that he was not such a fool as to seek the elusive metal, as the kea heads proved a veritable gold mine for him.

I also met in the South Island a person who had been a companion in nearly all parts of the bush where the kea is found, with one of New Zealand’s well known naturalists, and he stated that they had never in all their travels come across an authentic case of the kea killing sheep.

The kea, like a picture which needs a frame to set it off, also needs a fit setting. Seen in an aviary or cage, he isn’t the same bird as the one seen amid the glittering snow-capped peaks of his native home. Bluebells in a jam jar are not like those in the misty blue haze in the beech woods in the spring. And so it is with the kea. He loses a great deal of his charm when taken out of his proper setting. I have taken people to see the keas and they have usually been astonished when they saw them. “Why, that can’t be a kea; it’s a nice bird; I always thought it was a horrible thing, something like a vulture,” is the remark usually made by the lay person on seeing the kea for the first time.

Between the years of 1920 and 1928 the Government paid a subsidy on over twenty-nine thousand kea heads.

I was told of a district on the western slopes of the Alps where kakas and keas were found in the vicinity, but I was told that the two birds, although so closely allied, never consorted together.

*Perhaps I have talked too much about this bird, but I must ask to be forgiven, for to my mind it is one of the most interesting birds in the whole world, and so many lies have been written about it that I feel I must say something to vindicate its character.*