

the odds were a million to one against winning. In vain has it battled against the blizzards of a million years; at one swift stroke, comparatively speaking, its death knell was sounded.

That the kea will become extinct is a matter of much speculation on the part of naturalists. Some say that owing to the inaccessibility of its haunts it will never be shot out, but there are few spots now in the South Island of New Zealand where the sheep farmers have not penetrated, and the kea is to the average sheep farmer what a red rag is to a bull. Other observers state that the kea will linger on only in the places where it is protected. I am not in a position to make a statement either way except that in passing through a great portion of the Southern Alps I only saw this parrot at Mount Cook where it is protected.

If it does become extinct, perhaps they will tell us that, after all, it might have been a mistake about its carnivorous habits, but it will be too late then!

A Bogey Business.

Everything is being done to foster the idea about the kea's feeding upon mutton. Children in schools are taught about a horrible rapacious bird which feeds on the kidneys of living sheep. People who should know very much better have cases set up in museums with half a dozen keas in the act of devouring the carcass of a lamb heavily daubed with crimson paint.

Most people, naturalists included, love to add a little sensationalism, often at the expense of truth, to what otherwise appears to them dry scientific fact. Any out-of-the-way trait in the life of an animal is at once seized upon and enlarged beyond recognition, such as the fictitious remnants of the third eye in the tuatara (*Sphenodon punctatum*), a very rare and primitive form of lizard found only on some islands of New Zealand. And so it is with the kea. The association of this bird and sheep seems inseparable. Every time we see a kea pictured in a scientific book, in the background there are usually two of these "monsters" in the very act of tearing out the kidneys of a sheep. *To my mind it would be just as incongruous to represent human beings every time they were pictured, to be feasting on a mutton chop, and I'm sure that humans are far more entitled to be shown eating sheep than these parrots. For the majority of people feed at least once or twice a week on a sheep's carcass, and that is far more than the average kea does.*

In fact, I still have to be convinced that this bird kills sheep at all. No one I ever met had ever seen a kea kill a sheep, except one man whom I met, who said that he had seen two hundred killed in a night! I hardly liked to say that he was lying; so I merely said that at that rate they might easily dispense with the services of the slaughterman. *But with the tales of sheep-killing it is always the old story of someone who knew someone else whose friend had seen them.*