

No bird in the world is more malignantly libelled than the kea, and usually by people who know nothing whatever about it.

A Hardy Alpinist.

It is hard to imagine a bird, belonging to a family whose members are confined solely to the tropics, being able to sustain itself in such inhospitable regions, especially in the winter time, and sometimes even in the summer when bitter winds and furious blizzards roar up the alpine valleys where the kea makes its home. For days at a time torrential rains beat down, and the valleys fill up with drifting clouds and mists. Sometimes the winds are so strong that it is impossible to stand upright.

Not only does this bird manage to maintain itself, but it is able to "do itself very well" as they say in Yorkshire. With a specially adapted beak it digs amongst the alpine vegetation finding succulent roots, etc.; it also feeds to a great extent on the berries of the dwarfed trees. It is a remarkable thing that some of the stunted trees which grow only a few feet high bear larger berries than the same species which grow to a height of a hundred feet or more in the low-land forests. Most of the droppings which I examined contained the seeds of various alpine plants; as these were intact *the bird must act as the distributing agent for many of the berry-bearing shrubs of those regions.*

I have often seen them pull out quite large stones from the hill-sides obviously looking for something underneath; possibly for grubs or insects of some sort.

Natural Entertainers.

Keas are fascinating birds to watch; never in my travels have I met a bird of such interest. The chief trait in its character is unbounded curiosity. One has only to sit down quietly, especially in the evenings, and in a quarter of an hour or so one is surrounded by a crowd of these inquisitive birds. They never seem to alight near one, but usually a distance away and with a kind of a hop, skip, and a jump gradually get closer and closer until at last one is surrounded on every side by throngs of quietly speculating birds. They came within a few feet showing not the slightest fear. It is rather embarrassing and reminds me of going into an African village at the back of beyond and becoming in time the centre of attraction to a crowd of dusky youngsters who seem to have gathered from nowhere. The birds watch every action and examine every article left lying about. Sticks, cameras, glasses, coats, etc., come in for the closest scrutiny. At first the birds touch each article very gingerly with the tip of their beak, then they feel it with their tongue and when at last they feel that it is safe it is dragged away.

A stranger they seem to recognize and crowd around, but the ordinary people at one of the rest huts at Mount Cook they seem to