

kill half a dozen keas. The heads would be cut off and sent to the nearest depot and the killer would be awarded 5s. per head. This meant quite a nice little income. It is little wonder that these men, and also farmers, were anxious to keep alive the rumour about the keas' sheep-eating propensities.

Travellers come into the alpine regions where the bird is found, ask a few questions about it, usually never see the birds at all, then write a book. The two following are extracts from such types of books:—"These most destructive creatures are found in great numbers at the foot of snow mountains and kill the sheep by fastening their strong claws to the wool while they tear the flesh and eat out the livers," and again:—"The kea has a strange history. Once it lived on berries and grubs but years ago it became fond of mutton, and according to widely credited accounts it is very destructive to sheep. Alighting on the back of a sheep, the kea fixes its claws in the wool or flesh and quickly makes an opening with its two-inch beak." And so the lies grow. This kind of tosh is usually written by people who know nothing whatsoever about the habits of this bird, but who jump at any bit of sensationalism to enliven the otherwise dull pages of their literary products.

Ornaments of the Alps.

I was going to say that the kea is completely terrestrial, but that is pretty obvious, for it lives mainly above the tree line, but it is also a bird of the air, spending almost as much of its time in that element as upon the ground. It is a wonderful sight to see a flock of these birds wheeling round and round in the brilliant and intense sunshine in the rarefied atmosphere of the great ice peaks.

They are transformed from the dull greenish birds which we see in captivity or in museums; for it is then that we see the bright yellow-spotted flight and tail feathers and the beautiful bright orange underwing coverts. *In its proper setting the kea is a beautiful bird, often the only splash of colour in the sombre, desolate and stony valleys.*

I was astonished to find another bird which one does not usually associate with alpine regions, namely the southern black-backed gull (*Larus dominicanus*) with which the kea consorts. I have often seen a flock of keas and gulls mingled together wheeling overhead.

The call of the kea, when once heard, is never forgotten, for it is very distinctive. It is somewhat between the mewing of a seagull and the yelp of a dog. Sometimes the birds will make a call like that of a cat; at other times there is a strangely human sound in the calls.

They are extremely noisy birds, especially when on the wing and up in their mountain home. Few other sounds are to be heard except the continual thunder of falling avalanches or the cracking of the ice in the glaciers. When in the air the tips of the primary flight