

feathers are separated and upturned like those of an eagle; in fact the bird looks very hawk-like when in flight and this, no doubt, lends colour to the sheep-eating tales.

An Asset for Mount Cook

Around the Ball Hut by the Tasman Glacier at Mount Cook (12,349 feet) the keas are fairly numerous; there must be from fifty to sixty in the locality. Fortunately they are protected by the authorities at the Hermitage, the hostel at Mount Cook. But there are even people, including certain members of Parliament, who are using every effort to get them destroyed, and yet *never in the history of the Hermitage has a kea been known to touch a sheep, although there are hundreds around there, and keas and sheep live on quite friendly terms.*

A garbage dump at the foot of a stony cliff at the Ball Hut was a great attraction to the keas. They found many scraps to their liking, especially potato peelings. Their inquisitive nature also led them to spend a good deal of their time examining various objects such as tin cans, bottles, etc. There were one or two wild cats to be seen consorting with the parrots, and though the cats wandered in amongst the keas, the birds took not the slightest notice of them.

The sexes are easy to distinguish. The male bird appears to have the cere and the skin round the eye yellow, while in the female it is black. The lower mandible in the male is also a much brighter yellow; he also has a much lighter-coloured cap. I have never seen this way of sexing the kea mentioned before, but I am almost sure this is correct. I thought at first that the dark-coloured birds might be the young ones, but there are several in the Wellington Zoo which have been there for a considerable time and the skin still remains dark. I am open to correction, though, on this matter.

Like many other New Zealand birds this parrot is semi-nocturnal, and can be heard flying around long after the night has fallen. It can also be heard before the dawn in the mornings. With the four birds which I brought back to England, I found that most of the feeding was done at night. They roost in crevices in the rocks, under overhanging boulders or beneath the thick, matted alpine bushes.

Safe Nesting-Places.

The keas nest in deep holes in the rock, usually in places utterly inaccessible to human beings. This is one thing that has been to a large extent the salvation of the kea. During the whole time that "The Hermitage" has been in existence no one has ever found a single nest, and yet the guides are always penetrating to very remote parts.

I was at Mount Cook in April, and was told that the young ones had been round for a month or so. By allowing four weeks for incubation and six weeks for the young in the nest, it must be some time in December when the eggs are laid.