



The kea is usually described as an "alpine" parrot. However its favoured habitat is the timberline rather than the true alpine zone, although it ranges widely above and below this altitude. Photo: Kerry Wilson

It is difficult not to want to feed kea, so entertaining are they as they display their dexterity. However, in the interests of kea, people should refrain from feeding them: it encourages them into areas where their playfulness is ultimately unwelcome.



A kea nest, Mt Cook National Park. Photo: Kerry Wilson

Female Sole Incubator

The female does all the incubating, leaving the nest only to take food from her mate. In well over 100 hours of observation at nests, I have never seen the father enter the nest, although I have twice seen other adult males briefly enter a nest. Adult females also occasionally enter other birds' nests. Several times each day the male returns to a prominent perch, usually above the nest, and calls. The female emerges, takes food regurgitated by her mate, then quickly returns to her incubation duties. Initially this routine continues after the chicks hatch; all their food being gathered by their father, but conveyed from him to them by the mother. Once the chicks are several weeks old their demands can no longer be met solely by their father and the female begins foraging also. Even at this stage the male will not enter the nest. I once watched a male return to the nest while his mate was away foraging. He waited patiently outside for over half an hour, his frequent calls being answered by his hungry progeny. He finally gave up, left and returned with his mate an hour and a half later.