

Both parents take a role in post-fledging care. Although fledglings quickly learn to forage for themselves, they will beg, usually unsuccessfully from their parents, whom they usually accompany for several months.

While the nuclear family is the basic social group, kea are highly social animals and their groupings are remarkably fluid. At any time one or several of the family may be absent, or visitors, some of which are known to reside up to 5km away, may join the residents. In

spring, and less often in summer, groups of kea may even visit nest sites. In August 1989 I watched a group of eight adult kea visit one nest. Led by Geoffrey, the resident male, it included David, who was radio tagged a few months later and found to spend most of his time between 7 and 13 km down valley. Also present was Elizabeth, a female radio-tagged the previous season and resident directly across the valley 2.5-5 km away. The three other banded kea had previously been seen



*In contrast to adults, juveniles are coloured yellow around the eyes and by the beak. Within three years they change to grey.*

Photo: Kerry Wilson

within 3 km of the nest.

During each February visit to Ball shelter I have been entertained by "kea conventions" when up to 20 kea, many banded, some up to 15km away, arrive for night long revelry. The significance of this extensive socialising and its role, if any, in their mating system, feeding ecology and home range, is part of my study. Kea are apparently non-territorial, but live in



overlapping home ranges that vary considerably in size. Known breeding birds, for example Baldrick, Geoffrey and probably Charles (see the accompanying figure), seldom move more than 1.5 km from their nests. Presumed non-breeders (for example David and Cedric) are far more mobile. David had a core area covering about 6 km of valley, but he has been located at points as far apart as Hooker Moraines and Ball Shelter. Some kea begin this vagrant life early. A fledgling, apparently a son of Charles, was seen on 16 February 1990 near the village, 14 km south of his probable birthplace. Next day he was seen at Ball Shelter 1 km north of his natal nest.

At Mount Cook the greatest distance between sightings is about 25 km and movements of 10 km are not uncommon. However, Ria Brejaart has observed four of her banded kea move between Arthur's Pass and Mount Hutt, a distance of over 60 km.