

Kea Crimes

THE JUNE CASE of the “keanappers” proves just how vulnerable some of our native birds are. Kea are particularly at risk for the very reason that humans enjoy them – their engaging curiosity.

Parrots are especially under threat, as we pointed out in this magazine in February. It is estimated that a third of parrot species (103) are in sufficiently low numbers to cause concern, with a further 77 in grave danger of extinction. Poachers are hastening parrot species towards extinction: in 1986, 600,000 were traded worldwide, but only 20 percent reached their destination alive.

The kea poaching case demonstrates that the Department of Conservation must be adequately funded to counter this destructive trade; furthermore, fines must be increased to match those in Australia, where a person faces a maximum of \$100,000 fine and up to five years in prison.

Gerard Hutching



DoC conservation officer Stu Moore holding one of the kea rescued from bird poachers. It was later released into the wild.  
Photo: Christchurch Press

many localities on the main islands of New Zealand.

Conservation is not just a question of endangered species. New Zealand has many species that are still locally common but whose populations are small and isolated. In the face of continuing habitat loss and habitat modification, their future is uncertain. The endangered kakapo and kaka grab our attention and resources, while kea and parakeets may be sliding downhill to join them.

Long may the tranquility of the South Island mountains be shattered by the raucous screams of kea.

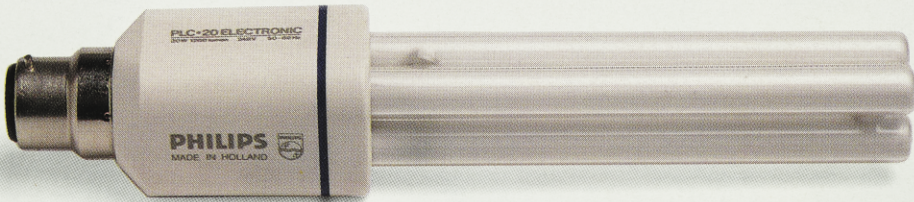
*If you see banded kea please record location, date and colour combinations. Take care to note which leg each band is on and whether the coloured bands are above or below the metal or other colour bands. If you can read the number on the metal band this is even better. Please send sightings to Kerry Wilson, Entomology Department, Lincoln University, Canterbury.*

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the staff at Mt Cook, Arthur's Pass and Craigieburn for the help they have given. Thanks to all the people who have helped band kea or reported sightings of banded birds. Rowan Emberson, Marnie Barrell and Ria Brejaart kindly commented on this manuscript. This research has been funded by the Lincoln University Research Fund and the Department of Conservation.

*Kerry-Jayne Wilson is a lecturer in ecology at Lincoln University. She is well known for her work on seals, carried out in the 1970s.*

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