



Photo credit Mark Forward

KEA GUIDELINES FOR PLANTATION FORESTRY

WHY ARE KEA IMPORTANT TO NEW ZEALAND?

KEA ARE CLEVER PARROTS



They are notorious for their habit of using their powerful beaks to tear apart gear and equipment they might find in our South Island forestry sites.

They are protected under the Wildlife Act.

With proper management, foresters can prevent harm to both the kea, and their own forest equipment.

Foresters who manage their estates to benefit biodiversity, especially helping endangered species such as kea, stand to gain by meeting Forest Stewardship Council requirements and earn a reputation as responsible environmental stewards.

IDENTIFYING KEA

The kea (*Nestor notabilis*) is the world's only alpine parrot. They grow to about 50 cm to the tip of their tail. Most feathers are olive green, but with scarlet under-wings.

Kea are unique to New Zealand and are found only in the South Island. They are a very inquisitive and intelligent bird. Their population is between 1,000 and 5,000 birds and they are nationally threatened under the New Zealand threat classification system. They are gregarious, cheeky and seemingly robust. But chicks in their ground-based nests are vulnerable to cats, rats, possums, ferrets and stoats.

As well as suffering habitat loss, kea were also culled, a practice that stopped in 1971.



DID YOU KNOW...?

Kea are dependent on their parents for up to six months.

Kea nest on the ground, usually in rock cavities. Breeding season is August to January. It takes approximately four months for chicks to fledge.



KEA NESTS

Kea nest in rock cavities or under tree roots in upland beech or lowland podocarp forest regions. Females usually breed every second year. Sometime between August and January, the female will incubate two to five eggs. The male provides her with food while she spends a month on the nest, usually eating vegetation, but occasionally grubs.

The chicks will leave the nest four months after they hatch and the parents will feed them for another two to three months.



Photo credit Corey Mosen



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JUVENILE AND SUB ADULT KEA



Juvenile birds (last year's chicks) have a pale crown. Their ceres (the skin at the top of the beak, around the nostrils) and eyelids, are rich yellow. Young kea commonly gather in mobs and may vigorously explore forest logging sites and other human locations. If there is no food, or something they can dismantle, they will get bored and move somewhere else.

Sub adults (2 to 4 year olds) have a dark crown. Their ceres and eyelids are patchy dark olive and yellow.

ADULT KEA



Kea become adult when they are four years old, but don't breed until they are five or six. By this time, they have a dark crown, eyelids and ceres, with perhaps only faint traces of yellow. These birds tend to be solitary visitors to forest sites and by this age they are not driven to destructively examine human made objects.



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WHAT TO DO WHEN KEA ARE AROUND?

Kea who visit forestry operations are usually young birds that ‘mob up’ at different times of the year and move from place to place. These birds are recognised as juveniles by the yellow colouring around their eyes, nostrils and mandible (jaw). They can cause ‘trouble’ with their habit of exploring everything with their beaks and being interested in ‘new things’.

Protocols should be followed to avoid negative effects on kea and forestry equipment. If young birds are not actively fed, they will eventually get bored or hungry and move on.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF KEA ARE PRESENT ON SITE?

- ❑ They are vulnerable and a nuisance and you should not encourage them to stay about, especially by feeding them.
- ❑ Don't leave food where kea can get at it.
- ❑ Keep food scraps in a secured bin.
- ❑ Don't play with them. Nor should you shout at or throw things at the kea. It just excites them and encourages them to stay.
- ❑ Don't leave building or vehicle doors open.
- ❑ Park under cover.
- ❑ Have a kea-kit of covers and tarpaulins on hand.
- ❑ Protect wires and cables with hydraulic hosing.
- ❑ Cover equipment and vehicle seats with a tarpaulin.
- ❑ Keep surplus equipment off site.
- ❑ Use cinnamon or garlic paste as a repellent on equipment. Some kea hate the taste.
- ❑ If you see any kea with a leg-band, report its colour combination to DOC.

SIGHTINGS

Report in the Naturewatch project – Biodiversity in Plantation Forests www.naturewatch.org.nz/projects/biodiversity-in-plantations



CONFLICT

Contact the Kea Conservation Trust for guidance and resources www.keaconservation.co.nz



BANDING

If Kea have leg bands, record the details and report it. www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/bird-banding/reporting-a-bird-band/



INJURED

If a Kea is injured or ill, contact the Kea Conservation Trust for guidance and resources www.keaconservation.co.nz



AT FORESTRY SITES ASSOCIATING WITH KEA IS BAD FOR HUMANS



Photo credit Mark Forward



Kea close to forestry sites, and their antics, can distract nearby workers and increase the risk of an accident.

Besides a fondness for car windscreen wipers, kea will also chew through or wreck cables and aerials, as well as safety features such as wiring for lights, communication, and rubber seals.

⚠ AT FORESTRY SITES ASSOCIATING WITH HUMANS IS BAD FOR KEA!

If young kea are fed by humans, they will associate humans with food and might be discouraged from learning how to fend for themselves.

Kea are at risk from ingesting lead from old paint or other foreign material which could poison them.

They will also be vulnerable to being crushed by forest machinery or hit by vehicles.

A FED KEA IS A DEAD KEA.



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NESTING KEA

Kea may nest near forestry sites. Negative impacts to breeding kea may occur when mechanical operations (such as road and skid site construction, tree harvesting, and land preparation) occur near an active kea nest. For example, harvesting work could crush their nest or frighten nesting kea away.

To avoid negatively impacting of kea breeding success, it is recommended that all mechanical operations are excluded from within 200 metres (line of sight) for a kea nest, until two weeks after fledging (approximately four months).

At present the effect of harvesting and other forestry- related activities on kea nesting success is unknown. However, it is likely that these activities will disturb kea nests.

If nesting is suspected (adults feeding each other, fluffy chicks with adults, and adult birds hanging around), contact the Environment Manager so monitoring and nest protection can be arranged.



SUMMARY GUIDELINES



1. Never feed kea.
2. Remove and dispose of all food scraps.
3. Close doors, windows and put covers on machinery and buildings.
4. Do not yell at or play with kea.
5. Be proactive and be prepared for kea. Have a 'kea-kit' readily available.
6. In areas with rock cavities and old tree root systems be aware of the potential for nesting kea (August to January). Have an alternate operational area available should nesting kea be present.
7. Any suspected kea breeding behaviour or the presence of downy chicks must be reported to the Environment Manager for advice on how to proceed.
8. Physically mark the location of the nest with flagging tape, so operators know the area to avoid.
9. Delay working in the area of the nest until the end of the operation for that area or go to an alternate area.
10. Where possible, all mechanical operations should avoid the area within 200m of the nest until two weeks after fledging (up to four months).
11. Where possible setbacks around the nest should not be reduced below 200 metres.
12. Operator vigilance is required at all times when working in close proximity to a nest site.