

All My Homies Love Native Manu – 95Bfm

1st April 2026 – Kea. **Play call** –

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/native-animals/birds/bird-song/kea-song.mp3>

- 1) **Classification** – Endemic, Nationally Endangered. Bird of the Year 2017. The world's only alpine parrot. Ancient parrot along with our Kākāpo and Kākā. Their ancestors were around when Aotearoa was still attached to the Gondwana supercontinent 200 Million years ago. Only 1,000-5000 kea today. Used to be heavily hunted and shot between 1860-1970. Was a Govt funded bounty on them for 100 years ending 1970 and people shot them for the money as well as their impacts on livestock. About 150,000 kea shot over this period. Seen as a threat to sheep farmers – they did and still do attack sheep – and we will talk more about that later. Only became fully protected in 1986, but some are still being shot.

2) Māori relationship to the Kea.

- a. Taonga species for Ngāi Tahu and Ngā iwi o Te Taihū (Northern Iwi).
- b. Kea – another onomatopoeic name resembling their call.
- c. Seen as a kaitiaki of the Southern Alps/alpine environment.
- d. Feathers highly prized for kākahu and korowai cloaks. Orange feathers particularly symbolized rangatiratanga and mana.
- e. Used for kai.
- f. **Whakatauki:**
 - i. “He kea ki pae maunga. He keorangi ki pae ata mai”. *The mountain parrot sits atop of the mountains, and sits atop of the pinnacle of intelligence*. Recently created whakatauki by Ngāi Tahu and Maori scholars. They speak about “when the kea have returned to our mountains in a state of abundance, so too will our ancient knowledge be returned”.
 - ii. “Ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga, nōnā te ao”. *The bird that eats of the tree of knowledge will gain the world*. This whakatauki is often applied to the kea due to its intelligence and high learning ability compared to other manu. And it reinforces that gaining knowledge will enable you to succeed.
- g. **Te Rautaki Wakaora Kea – Kea Recovery Strategy 2024-2034**
 - i. DOC is working in partnership with Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and The Kea Conservation Trust on a Kea Recovery Programme. It aims to enable the kea to thrive and also to address how we can manage conflicts with humans.

3) How would you describe the manu Piet?

- i. Gorgeous manu – large parrot, 879g, strong flier, olive green plumage with orange and yellow patterning underwing that flashes in flight. Their outside upper wings in flight flash blue and green with dark grey/black wing tips. Stunning manu. Slender grey black beak that is sharp and strong.
- ii. Females about 20% smaller and the bill is shorter. Sexually dimorphic like many birds – basically different features based on sex.
- iii. Can live up to 50 years in captivity.
- iv. One of the most intelligent manu in the world – super smart and inquisitive and this can get them into trouble. They like to dismantle things like rubber seals on car windscreens and wipers.
- v. The DOC website shares a few examples of their intelligence and antics:
 1. A kea learnt to turn on a tap at Aspiring Hut campground.
 2. A kea locked a mountaineer inside a toilet at Mueller Hut (what had the mountaineer been up to?).
 3. A kea learnt to set off stoat traps so it could get the eggs in the trap to eat.
- vi. They raid people's packs for food and just like to mess with our stuff

4) Who do they live and what do they eat?

- i. Used to be across both NI and SI but now restricted to Te Wai Pounamu.
- ii. They range over 4 million hectares from Farewell Spit to Waitutu right down the bottom of Te Wai Pounamu. Can be found in coastal dunes to alpine peaks but most common in high forests and subalpine and alpine zones. Not found in NI, Marlborough Sounds, Catlins and Rakiura.
- iii. Feeding – omnivores – shoots, fruits, leaves, nectar, seeds, plant tubers, insect larvae
- iv. Highly adaptive – they have learnt to scavenge on dead deer, chamois and tahr shot by hunters. Some have developed a taste for Hutton's Shearwater/Kaikōura Tītī chicks.
- v. An unfortunate food source are sheep – they target the fat around the kidneys and sit on the sheep and just dig in with their sharp powerful beaks. Causes death often by infection. Not pretty and they have been persecuted for this unfortunate practice. Moa bones found in a Canterbury swamp also looked like they had kea beak scratches so maybe this is a long evolved behaviour developed by the manu.

5) Breeding

- i. Monogamous life long bonding
- ii. Usually lay 4 eggs between July – January but peak is Aug-Sept.
- iii. Nest mostly in native forests on the ground in natural cavities, rock crevices, hollow bases of trees or roots, or in hollow logs.
- iv. Incubation 22-24 days, chicks stay on nest for 3months.
- v. Female does all the incubation and feeding but the male brings food to the mother and feeds her by regurgitation. Yum yum.
- vi. Normally one clutch per year but females don't nest every year.

6) Threats

- i. Historical shooting greatest threat. Although fully protected some are still shot illegally. The key is to work with DOC if you have a problem and DOC can relocate the manu away from farming areas.
- ii. Vulnerable to stoats, rats, feral cats etc because they are ground nesters and spend a lot of time on the ground.
- iii. Episodic semi-catastrophic deaths from beech and rimu masting events – basically massive seeding years. Stoat and rat numbers explode until the seeds are gone then the hoards of predators turn onto native manu and can almost wipe them out.
- iv. Unintended mortality from 1080 poison programmes, but lot of work going into minimising this. 1080 programmes essential for overall protection of our taonga species.
- v. Oddly – lead poisoning is also a problem. Some kea have developed a taste for lead as it taste sweet to them and is soft like chewing gum for them. They tear the lead off lead roofing nails and lead flashing on buildings, eat it and die from lead poisoning.

This is a wonderful special manu that we need to cherish – we have put it on our \$10 bill so let's use our money to protect this manu.

Song: Misex, Computer Games, 1979. Great lyrics about computers just when they were coming into public use. What's the connection to the kea? The start of human AI versus one of the smartest manu in the world for millions of years before humans evolved -there's some connection there surely????? Love the song!