



## Sharing the forest with our feathered friends

BY SANDRINE MARRASSÉ

In 2014 a group of curious kea visiting a forestry block was the catalyst for what is sure to be a long-lasting collaboration between the Kea Conservation Trust and Nelson Management Ltd (NML\* – the management company for the Nelson Forests estate). Kea are unusual in that they actively seek out interaction with people and property. The group of inquisitive birds was visiting and damaging logging equipment at one of NML's harvesting sites, and the crew contacted NML's Environmental Planner Heather Arnold to ask what could be done about the visiting kea. Heather contacted the Department of Conservation (DOC) for advice and they suggested she get in touch with Andrea Goodman, the Kea Conservation Trust's Kea Conflict Management Coordinator and Community Engagement Coordinator for the Top of The South. Andrea's role was newly created as a response to the high number of kea/human conflicts in the

Tasman region in 2014.

Nearly three years on, this working partnership to oversee conservation management of kea in the NML forest estate is an ongoing example of the work the company does to protect native fauna in its forest estates.

NML's Heather Arnold has been with the company for 15 years and is an advocate for environmental stewardship. Her work includes threatened species management as well as promoting the company's Environmental Management System. "The partnership we have with the Kea Conservation Trust is one based on trust, knowledge transfer, and mentoring," says Heather. "The Trust actively encourages kea protection and spent time with harvesting crews to educate and inform people about the birds and their unique qualities. We see our relationship with the Trust as a long-term and important one. Our shared aim is that kea are not threatened or impacted by our

operations. As a result of our engagement with the Trust we are better informed about kea and their characteristics, and NML staff and suppliers have a huge amount of respect for these highly intelligent birds."

Currently, there is a forestry protocol in place for the karearea (native New Zealand falcon) that was developed by the New Zealand Forest Owners' Association and WingSpan. NML are planning to work with the Trust and other forestry businesses to develop a similar guideline for forestry operations with respect to kea.

Andrea Goodman is excited about the protocol that is being developed. "From the Trust's point of view, it is great to be involved with these forestry companies. It shows a commitment to New Zealand's indigenous fauna. A lot of the harvest sites are in kea country, and kea will continue to be a part of the culture around these sites. If forestry companies can manage their harvesting operations with kea as a consideration in their planning, be it by kea-proofing gear or educating crews about never feeding kea, then we are all on the same page. We at the Trust acknowledge kea can be a right pain in the butt and we are very aware of the fiscal costs these birds can be responsible for. The message 'do not feed the kea' is my mantra, and it is so important."

"One of our harvesting crews was suffering a fair amount of machinery damage caused by kea," says Heather. "So the Trust came up with the idea of trialling a kea play gym to create a new and more attractive 'toy' in the bush for the kea to focus on."

Inherently inquisitive by nature, unfortunately kea are attracted to yellow and red colours (very common with forestry machinery), and it was hoped that by providing them with a new toy they would expend their energy exploring and interacting with the play gym and leave the harvesting machinery, tools, and vehicles alone.

"The aim was to have a strong steel frame, with enrichment items attached to occupy the kea," says Andrea. "These enrichment items are not to include food, as a food reward would only encourage kea to associate logging sites with food, and in turn encourage kea visits. The enrichment items were to be changed every couple of days to stop the kea from getting bored with them."

"We also wanted to gradually move the playground further away from the logging site every few days to try and entice the kea away from the logging activity. We set up cameras to record kea activity and see if they were visiting the playground. Footage shows they were visiting, but not staying for long. They were still investigating the

logging equipment too."

Visits by curious kea can have far more serious implications than property damage. Safety on job sites is the major focus for NML across all its operations, and visiting kea have the potential to be very distracting, especially if expensive or vulnerable parts of machinery (or the odd lunch) are being targeted. "Kea, by their nature are very entertaining, but safety is a key component of our successful operations. No one should be harmed while at work and not having issues with visiting kea helps to ensure the achievement of

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ANDREA GOODMAN,  
KEA CONSERVATION TRUST

safe operations," says Heather.

Another innovative project that NML voluntarily contributes to is the Biodiversity in Plantations project. Data collected in the forests is uploaded to the iNaturalist app and Naturewatch website. "It is a fabulous tool for recording and learning about the presence of threatened species," says Heather. "Using the app and website New Zealand forest managers can record sightings of threatened species. Within NML we are able to view who has entered sightings as each user has a unique identifier. We ask crews and staff to regularly report sightings either in the field (when telecommunication coverage allows) or back in the office. The use of smart technology has made the recording process seamless and instant. GPS locations are added automatically, photos can be uploaded, and you can request help with species identification from the global scientists and biologists who monitor the programme."

The technology is useful for tracking and monitoring kea and other native species, and, where possible, forestry operations can be planned based on this data. "We use the reporting function to access data for our annual monitoring and also for planning purposes," says Heather. "If we know about the presence of a threatened species before we undertake operations, we can plan for it. For example, if we have a recorded sighting of karearea being present and displaying protective behaviours in previous years, we may be able to plan to avoid known nesting areas during the nesting and fledging periods. Similarly, if we have operations planned for locations that kea are known to visit, we can remind crews that having no food



ABOVE Andrea Goodman from the Kea Conservation Trust trials the kea play gym at a forestry site near St Arnaud (photo: John Henderson)  
OPPOSITE PAGE Curious kea investigate a logging site near Murchison (photo: Corey Mosen)

scraps is the most important thing they can do to minimise the potential for kea visits and damage."

As information and knowledge continues to be shared between NML and the Trust, the potential for discouraging kea from frequenting logging sites is enhanced. The work that NML and the Trust are doing to create a kea protocol for the forestry sector will be an important contribution to the conservation management of this unique and fascinating bird. **WT**

*[\*Nelson Management Ltd is the management company for Nelson Forests' 78,000 hectares of forest in the Nelson, Tasman, and Marlborough regions. More than 600 people are employed across the business, and the company harvests 1.1 million m3 of timber sales annually. 70% of the logs harvested are processed by local mills into products for the domestic and export markets. As part of its ongoing commitment to environmental best practice, in 1996 NML formed its Environmental Improvement Committee, and in 2010 achieved Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®) Certification. FSC® certification requires the submission of an annual monitoring report and an independent audit of the company's operations every two years. FSC® certification is internationally acknowledged as setting the most rigorous environmental and social standard for accountable forest management and requires that forests are managed according to strict environmental, social and economic standards.]*

### Contact

nelsonforests.co.nz  
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### ABOUT KEA

- Kea are the world's only mountain parrot, unique to the South Island of New Zealand
- Kea are known to inhabit areas from alpine heights right down to sea level
- Kea are a solid parrot about 46cm long (about the size of a cat sitting up). They have a wingspan of about one metre when they are in flight
- Kea are a highly intelligent species and exhibit complex social and cognitive behaviours
- The collective noun for a group of kea is a 'circus' or a 'conspiracy'
- Kea are neophilic - meaning that they love exploring anything new and are attracted to human activity and belongings

### DID YOU KNOW?

- You should never feed kea! Humans feeding kea encourages them to stay in populated areas and kea attracted by human activity are more likely to die as a result of human-induced threats
- Kea are ground nesters. This makes them very vulnerable to predation. In areas where there is no predator control, very few chicks make it to adulthood
- Kea are nationally threatened and their numbers are declining
- There are only 1000-5000 kea left in the world
- Wild populations of kea are only found in New Zealand
- The Kea Conservation Trust is a charitable trust that relies on sponsorship and donations to do its work