



Title: *“Kea Just Wanna Have Fun”*

Description: Young kea playing, Upper Hollyford Valley.

Photographer: Paul Sorrell

Where, when: Upper Hollyford Valley, Fiordland, December 2017

Sustainability? This photograph, showing a pair of juvenile kea (the world’s only mountain parrot) tussling over a discarded cigarette, won the Human Impact on the Environment Award for 2017 in the annual wildlife photography competition run by the Otago Museum. It was taken in a well-visited layby on the Te Anau–Milford road in the country’s deep south. By getting down low, I was able to fit both their heads in the frame, pressing the shutter at a moment when both birds’ eyes were in sharp focus.

I was able to take this image relatively easily as the birds were attracted to an area frequented by visitors, where buses and cars often stopped precisely to see the keas and feed them scraps. Natural clowns, these alpine parrots know how to keep an audience entertained with their acrobatic antics as they peck away at rubber seals and wiper blades.

The Department of Conservation has been running a “Please don’t feed the kea” campaign for 30 years now. They are concerned that feeding kea “junk food” is unhealthy and disrupts their learning to forage for natural foods – a key skill for self-reliance when there are no tourists about. Supplementary feeding of threatened species has its place in species recovery, but requires extreme care and monitoring. For example, while supplementary feeding of kākāpō has been used for years to stimulate breeding, it was discovered that overfed breeding birds tended to produce male chicks, whereas population recovery depended on producing more female recruits.

Free feeds also gives kea plenty of time to trash your car! Signs warning against feeding these birds are proving effective. On my last visit to the area, feeding had

stopped and the kea were nowhere to be seen. Let's hope they found some alternative entertainment elsewhere.

With fewer than 7000 birds remaining in the wild, kea face serious threats from mammalian predators and lead poisoning from old paint and roof fittings. Shooting of kea by sheep farmers, which killed over 150,000 birds, was outlawed in the 1970s. Occasionally a "rogue" kea develops the habit of attacking sheep (giving them a miserable death), so a strict risk evaluation process is followed by DoC, occasionally leading them to shoot the recidivist kea if no other remedy can be found. Conservation is not for the faint-hearted: tough decisions are often required for social collaboration to achieve species recovery goals.

Photo notes: *Camera:* Canon EOS 7D. *Lens:* EF400mm f/5.6L USM. *Settings:* 400mm f/6.3 1/160 sec ISO 800.

Digital specs: 5184 × 3456 pixels (14.9 MB).

Key words: Birds, upland birds, kea, alpine parrot, *Nestor notabilis*, Upper Hollyford Valley, montane ecology, mammalian predation, environmental threats, biodiversity, Paul Sorrell, Aotearoa, New Zealand, sustainability

Price: \$200 (incl. GST) for use of the digital image.

Visit www.ecosystemsphotography/sales for details & to order, and to get a quote if you want a high-quality print.

Donation: The price includes a \$100 donation to a sustainability organisation or project of your choice, or otherwise for the *Kea Conservation Trust* <https://www.keaconservation.co.nz/>.

Established up in 2006, the Kea Conservation Trust works to conserve wild kea in their natural habitat and to increase the husbandry standards and advocacy potential of kea held in captive facilities within New Zealand.

Image Ref: PS#005 (Please refer to this reference in orders and correspondence).

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