

Living with kea



KEA
CONSERVATION
TRUST



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Sharing spaces with an inquisitive parrot

If you live in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, you may at some stage have shared your habitat with the inquisitive kea. This nationally endangered native parrot can be found from the mountains to the sea, with estimated numbers of 3000–7000 birds across New Zealand.

Certain areas of the South Island are strongholds for kea, including the West Coast. Living near one of these areas may mean you've noticed them around your property, especially over the summer months when young kea have just left the nest and are exploring new environments.





Thanks to the efforts of Predator Free 2050 and the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) to eliminate possums, rats and stoats from public conservation land, kea numbers are likely to increase in the future – and so too are human encounters with these ‘clowns of the mountains’.

We want everyone to enjoy living with kea as they are such a special icon of Aotearoa.

We also want to remind everyone

that, although it may seem like these birds have made your backyard their home over the summer months, they will likely move on once it gets cooler.

This booklet aims to help you keep your property and kea safe.

The accompanying booklet ***How you can help protect kea*** provides information on how you can help monitor kea numbers in your area.



Steps you can take to reduce kea damage to your property

We know that sometimes kea can stick their beaks into things you'd rather they didn't, so we'd like to offer some easy ways to 'kea proof' your property.

What attracts kea?

Lead

One of the biggest draw cards for kea is lead – most commonly lead-headed nails and lead flashings found in buildings made before 1991. These birds love the taste of lead, but lead is poisonous and one of the biggest causes of kea deaths. If you suspect your property may contain lead-headed nails or lead flashings, please let us know and we will help you find a solution.



Food

Food is one of the main reasons kea will hang around your property. If they get even a small taste of food once, they may stick around for weeks or months in the hope of getting more. Bring all food inside, including pet food, and make sure your compost and rubbish/recycling bins are kea proof.

For compost, this means putting your compostables in a bin with a lid that has a latch to secure it – kea have been known to learn how to open easy-lift lids by themselves!

For other rubbish, use bins with latched or heavy lids – for example, you can attach a 1–2 kg weight to the underside of the lid with screws to weigh it down. You could also try putting a heavy object on the lid, but kea have been known to push these off.

If you need help making any of these changes, please get in touch as one of our staff will be happy to come and help.



Things left outside

Pack away anything moveable such as shoes, clothing, umbrellas, power tools, toys, etc when you go in for the day. Kea are most active at dawn and dusk, and they're most likely to get into trouble when people aren't around.

Covering things that you can't move, such as spa pools with tarpaulin, works well at deterring these birds.

Rubber wiring

Kea like to chew on rubber-coated wires on tractors, solar panels, etc. To protect your wiring, run it inside plastic conduit piping. The birds may chew on the plastic piping, but it's easier to replace a piece of piping than the wire!

Dark colours such as black tend to work best.

Sheds

Close all shed doors and windows overnight so kea can't get inside. If your shed doesn't have a door to close, make the space as difficult as possible for a bird to get into.

Cars / bicycles

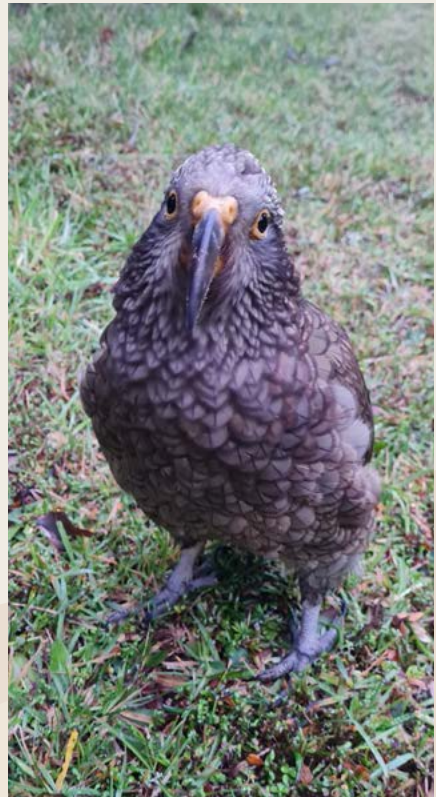
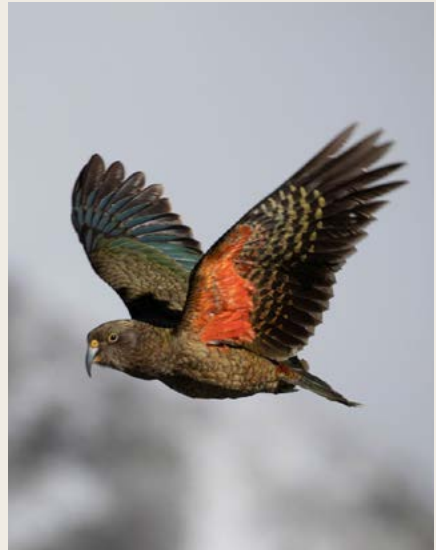
Kea love chewing on rubber and seats. Use car covers if possible or park your vehicle in a garage with a closeable door. Likewise, cover bike seats with a bucket / tarp or store the bike inside.

Heavy machinery

Diggers, tractors, quad bikes, etc can be attractive to kea. Always close the cab doors where possible or store the machinery in a shed or garage, and cover seats and any areas that have rubber, such as handlebars or windscreen seals and wipers, with a tarpaulin.

Chimney flues

If kea are getting at the rubber around your chimney flue, you can create a cone that sits over the rubber. This is fairly simple and cheap to make out of flat sheet steel, and most local builders will be able to do this for you. Check out this online tool for calculating the required measurements: https://craig-russell.co.uk/demos/cone_calculator/. The sawn-off end of a mussel buoy can also be used.





Humans

Kea like to play. By interacting with them, you're encouraging them to stay on your property. This includes following them around, talking to them, and even throwing things at them, shouting at them or banging on the roof to scare them, as they may think you are just trying to play with them. Try to ignore them as much as possible.

Silage

As a preventative approach, it is recommended that baled silage is stored in pit holes – this is where bales are kept underground and covered by at least 30 cm of dirt, often with extra tarpaulins and tyres placed on top. If you store your silage in bales above ground, you might find that kea will tear at the plastic wrapping. It can be difficult to prevent this, but one option is to use strobe lighting, which kea don't seem to like. The Kea Conservation Trust have units they loan out when needed. Please contact them for more advice.

What else can you do?



Sometimes you can deter kea by **spraying them with water from a hose or sprinkler system**, but make sure you don't miss or the birds will think you're playing a game with them!



Kārearea / New Zealand falcon calls have been used successfully in some areas to deter kea from property. Play through a loud speaker when kea approach.



Some kea are also put off by **loud, deep-sounding bells**. You could attach bells to things to keep the birds away. If the kea like the sound of bells, this might draw their attention away from the object you want to keep safe.

What shouldn't you do?



Don't use strong-smelling ointments like Deep Heat or Vicks VapoRub as a deterrent as they could attract kea.



Also avoid using fine-gauge chicken wire as the kea will likely chew right through it with their sharp bills.



The idea of kea proofing your property is to make it as **boring as possible** for kea so they don't stick around.

If you're having trouble with kea

The Kea Conservation Trust and DOC are not responsible for paying for any damage kea cause to your property, but we want to help you as much as we can to stop the birds potentially destroying things on your property. If you are having any trouble with kea on your property, **please report the issue** to the Kea Conservation Trust or contact your local DOC office.

Kea Conservation Trust

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