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SHORT NOTE

Kea (*Nestor notabilis*) make meals of mice (*Mus musculus*)

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Walking down Sudden Valley, Arthur's Pass National Park on 22 October 2000, we stopped to observe a kea (*Nestor notabilis*) perched on a large rock in the riverbed (1400 h, K33 037 069). While we watched, the kea dropped down to the water edge and flew back up to its rocky perch with something in its beak. It then proceeded to consume what was obviously an animal – we thought perhaps a mouse (*Mus musculus*).

Our assumption was confirmed about 1 h later when again we stopped to observe a kea, perhaps the same bird, in the riverbed (1520 h, K33 044 046). It was hopping from rock to rock along the edge of the stream. It then dived between the rocks flapping its wings vigorously. When it hopped back up onto the rocks it had what was unmistakably a wet mouse in its beak. While we watched, the kea held the mouse in its feet, used its beak to skin back the fur, and consumed the mouse.

From these 2 observations, it seems that the opportunistic kea had taken advantage of the high

mouse numbers following a period of high beech (*Nothofagus* spp.) seed fall and turned to active hunting. Higgins (1999: 616-617) refers to several detailed studies listing items observed eaten, including animals; insects, larvae, shearwater chicks and eggs, sheep, and fatty food scraps. Our observations appear to be the first record of small mammals being eaten by kea.

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Higgins, P.J. (ed.) 1999. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds, vol. 4, Parrots to dollarbird*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

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