



The Kaka

ONE OF NEW ZEALAND'S JEWELS

Jade Welch



Originating from New Zealand the Kaka is a brush-tongued parrot of great intelligence and interest. To some they may look somewhat odd and out of this world and not be immediately recognized as a parrot. A parrot they are though indeed and like many parrot species they have declined throughout their range. The following is a small article that has been compiled with the assistance of aviculturalist's and zoo people.

Sub-species

There are two sub-species of Kaka. Quite simply the two are divided between the North and South Island. The South Island containing the nominate race *Nestor m. meridionalis*. The North Island sub-species *Nestor m. septentrionalis* is said to be smaller and not as intensely coloured as the nominate form. They are found in native forests and on islands and at times venture close to suburbia.

Current Status

There are currently estimated to be between 1,000-5,000 individuals in the wilds of New Zealand. As it stands the Kaka is listed as vulnerable and breeding programs have worked on producing birds in captivity and releasing them into the wild. These have been quite successful with captive bred released Kaka being seen in areas they had disappeared from long ago. These captive bred birds appear to mix in well with wild Kaka and are breeding.

Threats

Threats come in the form of habitat clearing and predation and competition for food by pest species. These include possums, cats, stoats and more. The advent of pest free fenced off reserves has helped not only the Kaka but also other native species.

Diet

Wild Kaka consume a diet of seeds, berries, honeydew, nectar, sap, and live food. The foods consumed are seasonal

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and birds move in search of food throughout the year. They are great pollinators of the forest and aside from a brush tongue they also have a large bill. This is used to extract wood boring larvae from trees and fallen stumps. They can be heard in the forest prizing open branches to get to the larvae they so desire.

Within a captive setting Kaka are very open in their dietary requirements. The species thrives on a varied diet with protein added as well. The following foods were fed to one captive population of Kaka.

- Generic parrot mix
- Walnuts, Almonds, Peanuts
- Vegetables
- Fruits

To this diet also provided was wild browse and flowers. *Coprosma grandifolia* a species native to NZ was provided especially when in berry. The Kaka devours the fruit before stripping the leaves, eating the bark and the young shoots. For the nectar component native flax flowers, bottlebrush and any other flowers that were non-toxic were also provided and relished.

A supplement mixture containing Strawberry Complian and honey water was also provided and relished. A lot of live food was given and the birds especially loved chewing out rotten logs and feeding on the grubs of the huhu beetle.

A diet fed to another captive population consists of

- A generic parrot seed mix
- A nectar mix that contains pollen
- Lots of seasonal fruit and vegetables (Dates are relished)
- Berries of coprosma and cotoneaster
- Flax Flowers and Tree Lucerne
- Mealworms are offered but never taken
- Logs are given regularly for the birds to extract larvae from



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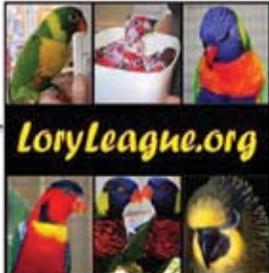
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Housing

To be fully appreciated Kaka require a large spacious aviary. Although they are largely arboreal they will and do spend a lot of time on the ground foraging. One pair was housed in a large planted aviary approximately 30m in length by 10m wide by 4m in height. This was for display purposes as well as conservation. It must be said that every inch of the space was well used by the birds and that anything new will be checked out very quickly and probably destroyed. Such is the intelligence of these birds that much should be given for the birds to exercise their brain.

For private avicultural purposes a smaller aviary may be used. It should be conventional with access to the floor of the aviary and allow for the birds to exercise and explore. Again the addition of stimulus is required more so than maybe required with some other parrot species. One private aviculturist houses their birds in an aviary measuring 6 metres long x 6 metres wide x 3 metres high.

Breeding

Wild Kaka nest in tree cavities usually high above the ground except on islands where the nest may be closer to the forest floor. Up to 4 eggs are laid with 2-4 chicks being the norm. Young generally fledge at around 8 weeks of age and remain on the ground for an extended period, as they aren't usually fully developed. This makes them prone to predation from the likes of stoats. Kaka are relatively free breeders once paired up.

Private Aviculture

Sadly this species is in the hands of less than a handful of private aviculturalist's. New Zealand's authorities have a tendency to make the keeping of any native parrot species extremely difficult if not impossible. This is despite many competent aviculturalist's putting their hands up to work with the delightful birds of New Zealand. It can only be hoped that the government one day will recognize the untapped talent it has in its own backyard.



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Conclusion

Kaka are very comical and become very approachable once settled. They make for interesting avicultural subjects and have a high intelligence level. They are a pleasure to watch in the wild and if anything are well worth searching for during a visit to New Zealand. One can only hope that one day this species is better presented in aviculture like its fellow countrymen the Kea.

Point of interest

NZ has three large parrot species - the Kea is the mountain parrot, the Kaka is the forest parrot, and the Kakapo is the ground parrot.

Thanks

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