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**Innovative behaviours and  
personality traits in captive kea  
(*Nestor notabilis*) as a model for the  
emergence of kea strike in wild  
populations**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Conservation Biology,  
at Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand

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2017

## **Abstract**

The personality traits of seven captive kea (*Nestor notabilis*) were investigated in terms of neophobia, problem solving ability, and innovation. The first objective was to compare the personalities of the birds and assess these in relation to demographic factors including age and sex, as well as looking at the effect of isolated versus group housing. Kea are known to require high standards of enrichment and sociality, so this information can be used to determine the effect their captive housing may have on important wild traits. The second objective was to observe whether particular personalities or demographic factors made a kea more innovative, or in this case more likely to attack a sheep. Kea strike is a phenomenon whereby kea attack sheep, which often die as a result. This conflict has led to approximately 100,000 kea being shot by farmers in retaliation, and as a consequence there has been a dramatic decline in the wild kea population.

In order to assess each individual's relative neophobia or neophilia, novel objects were presented to the kea and their reactions observed. Problem solving ability was measured by using a Multi-Access Box, which required the birds to use one of four different access routes to retrieve a food reward. To observe levels of innovation and the likelihood of kea strike emerging, a mechanical sheep analogue was used. This was made to resemble a sheep, and contained a food reward for the kea to find. The juveniles in this study were much more neophilic and adept at problem solving than the adults, and this is thought to be because juveniles are still learning about their environment and these traits are therefore highly beneficial to them. Only one juvenile successfully completed the sheep analogue task, and she was the most neophilic and adept at problem solving. This suggests that highly neophilic and explorative kea are more likely to develop innovative behaviours such as kea strike. Understanding the drivers behind kea strike is important if tools are to be developed to minimise the conflict in the future.

## ***Acknowledgements***

I would firstly like to extend my full gratitude to my Massey University supervisors, Professor Brett Gartrell and Associate Professor Phil Battley. Brett has been there from the very beginning, and without him I would not have had the opportunity to work with such an amazing species, nor the chance to complete a thesis I am so proud of. I would like to thank Phil for his last minute editing, which has helped me so much as I've put together my final thesis. We had a bit of trouble communicating at the start but we got there in the end. I'd also like to thank Carolyn Gates for helping with the statistics when it all got a bit overwhelming for me.

Next I must extend a huge thank you to Clio Reid, who has let me borrow her methods and equipment with no questions asked (even when I did manage to misplace a few bits and pieces at the zoo). She has been a great inspiration to me and without her the idea for this thesis would not exist.

Many thanks to the team at Wellington Zoo for allowing me to use their kea for my research, especially Sarah van Herpt who helped get the project started. A huge thank you to Bridget Brox for all her running in and out of the enclosures and sitting out in the rain with me for hours watching the birds do absolutely nothing. She also went out of her way to create an online survey to help with the data recording, which made my life so much easier when it came to analysing the videos.

I would also like to thank my family for always believing in me even when I wanted to give up. They have always been so supportive and have listened to me ramble on about kea even when I'm sure they weren't interested. A special thank you to my aunty and uncle, Karen and Peter Trotter, who let me stay at their house during my travels between Palmerston North and Wellington. My friends have also been an amazing support crew through this time. They have been cheering me on even when I felt like I was getting nowhere. Lastly thanks to the kea at Wellington Zoo who put up with me staring at them and putting strange devices in this enclosure – they made this research so much fun.

This research was approved by the Massey University Ethics committee (protocol number 16/26) and the Department of Conservation (authorisation number 48716-RES).

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