

them at the first test, and suggested their unfitness for the struggle of life. Or could the parents have reasoned it out that it would be better for them to have two well-developed young ones than four half-starved ones? It is possible that we underestimate the wisdom of many wild creatures, because we have every-day proof that we do not understand some of their faculties. We know that the cuckoos are as much politicians as our members of Parliament; that seals are navigators without instruments; and that migratory birds may have a knowledge of astronomy and the calendar; but we lump it all as instinct, as if we knew how it is done.

However it may be, I could hardly drag the young birds out of their nest, for they would hang on to everything with beak and claws, but I wanted them for pets and took them away. They were rather hard to feed at first, for I took them before they were feathered. When feeding them they had a queer way of shuffling their heads, which from my point of view was better for scattering the food about the floor than getting it down their throats. One of them is rude and bold and has a stronger beak, while the other is gentle and pretty, has a different voice, and is probably a female. The big one will not allow her to get a morsel of food till he is satisfied. If she shakes her head and tries to swallow any he will put his beak in her mouth and prevent her; and it is plain that if food was scarce, and if the male always acted in the same way, which is not unlikely, his conduct would tend towards a scarcity of females. This may be Nature's good reason for the females being the weaker, for she has many clever designs for the improvement of her people. Keen competition among the males would keep away the inferior or immature, which is very important for improvement sake. In many cases the fighting weapons in horns and tusks are specially designed for this, as if quality was more desirable than numbers. The kakas can cut wood with their beaks like a mallet and chisel, so that only the bravest and best would carry on the race if there was any great scarcity of females; and the fight is the only thorough test for soundness, cleverness, and courage. The way that our young men pass their examinations seems to be more a test for memory and attention than the above.

My pets required feeding about five times a day, and I soon found that I had undertaken a task that I had not bargained for. You must remember that the parrots chew their food thoroughly in their beaks, and that the parents prepare it thus for the young ones, and carry it home in their crops. So I had to pound up a piece of biscuit and mix it with mince-meat or fish, and then pour on boiling water to form a pulp that could be forced through a little rubber tube. The danger is that they will swallow anything you give them if it is slightly warm, because they depend on the parents to give them what is suitable. I was trying one of mine to see if he cared for the fruit of a miro-berry, and he swallowed it whole. The stone lodged in the little gizzard, where there was not room to grind it up, and ultimately caused his death. For the same reason it is dangerous to give them gravel, because the parents may have given them sufficient to last them till they grow up.

When an old kaka eats a grub he generally rejects the skin, but when he is done with it it is like a bit of dry tissue-paper. When I offered my pets grubs they would either drop them or swallow them whole, and I did not know how to manage. Evidently I took them too young.

When they became able to fly they ceased to be any more trouble, but would sit out in the bushes most of the day. They were most active late in the evening, and would come for food, and choose what they liked best. They were very affectionate, and were always craving for caresses and attention. They also acted kindly towards each other, for the big one's rudeness had ceased long ago, perhaps when its little mate had passed the prescribed test.

Soon after the big one died the little one was killed by a hawk. I heard the screams of distress a little way in the bush and went quickly to see what was the matter, but several old kakas had answered the call, and one of them followed the hawk about through the trees while others tried to intercept him, but they were not nearly smart enough for the sparrow-hawk. None of them seemed to be the least afraid of him except my little one, that was dazed and cowered under a limb. This showed that the first-rate kaka was too many for that hawk, while my second-rater in physique and education became his easy victim, for it died a few days afterwards, and showed the marks of the hawk's claws in its body.

This showed the futility of rearing any but the best, and the necessity of rearing them in the best manner. Therefore there is clear common-sense in getting rid of the inferiors at the earliest sign of their unfitness, so that the others might have plenty of food for their full development. If any pair of kakas tried to rear and protect four young ones they might all go to feed the hawks, and their labour would be thrown away so far as kakas were concerned, or worse than thrown away if it only went to feed their enemies.

That hawk tried on a stratagem that is worth noting. He flew out in the open where every one could see him, and appeared to fly right away. I could not get my pet down out of the tree and had to leave it, but was not long up at the house when it was screaming again. Down I went with a gun I had just got ready, and got an easy shot at the hawk—the same hawk, for it had a notable light-coloured breast, which I think indicates age, or at least it does so in the case of the harriers.

The female kakas generally have lighter-coloured heads than the males, also weaker beaks, but they all vary greatly in the little details, so that no two of them are exactly the same. At one time my young male showed a distinct crest, but it disappeared in a few weeks.

Many New Zealand trees and shrubs are very erratic in producing their fruit, for sometimes all berries will be scarce or absent altogether at their proper season, while without any regularity other seasons will produce abundantly; and even a rata-tree that may produce 1 cwt. of honey this year may not have a spoonful for two years running. Yet the kakas and kakapos seem to know beforehand, and will often have their young ones hatched just when there is plenty of food for them. At Te Anau the pukekos only bore one crop of berries in about seven years. All the ducks eat them, even the blue ducks.