

## KAKAPO CAVES

From 12th to 19th February, 1960, I was fortunate enough to join Marshall Small and Ralph Adams, of the New Zealand Wildlife Service, in a search for the Kakapo in the Tutoko Valley.

This valley has always appealed to me because of its similarity to the site of previous Kakapo finds at George Sound (Hall-Jones, 1960). Both areas have sub-alpine slopes with maximum exposure to the sun, and possibly of even greater importance, both areas are almost totally devoid of deer.

The latter finding is unusual in Fiordland and one naturally wonders as to whether there has been some competition for food between these two vegetarians, with survival of the bird in only deer-free areas. Certainly our party confirmed this remarkable lack of deer and only on one occasion were a few foot-prints seen. The favourite deer foliage, *Nothopanax* spp., was in abundance.

Two stoat nests were found, but although both contained a multitude of assorted feathers, no Kakapo feathers were identified.

An unexpected find was that of a dead chamois at the foot of Mount Grave. This species has not previously been reported in this area.

Close to the foot of Grave Couloir, we located two caves which had recently been inhabited by Kakapo. In both cases, a tunnel allowed one to wriggle into a larger chamber about two to three feet in height and of similar diameter.

We were surprised to find that in both cases the floor was dust-dry, in spite of very heavy rain the previous night, during which our river rose several feet. Both caves contained Kakapo droppings almost entirely composed of Tutu seed as described by Williams (1960). Other contents included small fragments of moss and fern, and in the second cave, a prune stone! The latter probably originated from the nearby Pawnbroker Bivouac Rock, which is occasionally used by climbers.

Although not of the dimensions of previous finds at George Sound, a shallow depression at the entrance to one of the caves was probably a dusting or scratching hole.

At the foot of Mount Tutoko we located two similar caves, this time containing several Kakapo feathers. One was approached by an ill-defined track. It is interesting to note that in all four cases the caves were found under large isolated rocks.

Nearby, there was an unusually prolific growth of Tutu, dissected by several tracks. Along these runways we found a number of Kakapo droppings and feathers. It would appear that the Tutu berry forms an important part of the Kakapo's diet during this part of the year.

No nocturnal watches were kept, and although no Kakapo were actually seen or heard, we gained the impression that there were at least a few of the species alive in this valley.

Another notable feature of the valley was the complete absence of calls of Weka and Morepork. The large number of trees in berry probably accounted for the frequent flocks of Kereru seen during the expedition.

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## REFERENCES

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