

1882.
NEW ZEALAND.

LIVE STOCK AND RABBITS.

(REPORT AS TO RABBITS.)

Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives by Leave.

REPORT ON THE WORKING OF "THE RABBIT NUISANCE ACT, 1881," BY MR. B. P. BAYLY, SUPERINTENDING INSPECTOR OF RABBITS.

MR. B. P. BAYLY, Superintending Inspector under "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1881," to the
COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

Wellington, 23rd June, 1882.

I have the honor to submit the following remarks with reference to the rabbit pest in the colony, and the steps taken to abate the nuisance.

The Rabbit Nuisance Committee of 1881 having fully ventilated the question as to the spread of the evil and damage done thereby, it seems unnecessary to reopen that matter now. I shall confine myself, therefore, to what has been done since the Act of 1881 came into force on the 19th September.

I may say that during the last ten years the evil has increased sufficiently to make itself felt, and from time to time steps were taken by local trusts to grapple with the evil so apparent. Although undoubtedly good work was effected in some places, yet the want of combined and general action clearly showed that an Act to deal universally with the whole colony became a necessity.

The Act of 1881 having placed the administration of the law in the hands of the Government, the first action taken was the constitution of districts and appointing of officers. To simplify matters it was determined that the boundaries of the districts should be coterminous with county boundaries. It was also deemed expedient to appoint the Sheep Inspectors as Rabbit Inspectors, so as to work the Sheep and Rabbit Acts conjointly, thus saving the necessity of a new and separate staff of officers.

NORTH ISLAND.

In November, 1881, the Wairarapa Rabbit District was constituted, and the Act brought into operation. To meet the requirements of the Act, assistants as authorized agents were employed by the Inspector. Contracts were entered into when possible for the destruction of the pest on Crown lands and reserves, and the importation of ferrets to turn out on these lands was decided upon.

The Districts of Napier, Wellington, and Gisborne have been constituted, to prevent the introduction of rabbits and the spread of the pest into those parts of the colony, and to legalize action of Inspectors in protecting the natural enemies of the rabbits. For these districts there are four Inspectors, all of whom are Inspectors of Sheep, together with ten authorized agents, three of the latter being Inspectors of Sheep. In selecting the authorized agents for employment by the various Inspectors endeavours have been made to obtain the services of those who, by their knowledge of the country and capabilities, were best qualified to assist in having the requirements of the Act complied with.

SOUTH ISLAND.

In November and December full inquiry was instituted as to the best manner of forming districts, and appointing of officers. Consequent upon such inquiry, in February last Otago and Southland were divided into nine districts. The Blenheim and Kaikoura Rabbit Districts, in Marlborough, were also constituted, and inspectors appointed to the different districts.

For the eleven districts there are thirteen Inspectors, all of whom are Inspectors of Sheep, together with sixteen authorized agents employed by them.

Not until February could it be said that work had actually commenced. Even then, a great amount of information had to be acquired before the Inspectors were in a position to commence active duties.

In working the Act, the different descriptions of lands to be dealt with may be classed as freehold and leasehold, waste lands of the Crown, and Native reserves, and reserves as classed under Schedule of "The Public Reserves Act, 1881." These do not, however, include lands within boroughs, which are exempted by the Act, and the duty of removing rabbits from these borough lands is cast upon the Government. With freehold or leasehold lands only ordinary difficulties are encountered, as the establishment of ownership is easily determined; but with the reserves, owing to the many and divers purposes for which they were set apart, it becomes a work of endless difficulty to ascertain their position and then establish ownership. Where vested in public bodies, such bodies are as a rule difficult to deal with, and legal proceedings become surrounded with complications. These reserves often number a hundred in one district, especially in the South Island.

Where large blocks of Crown and Native lands exist the mode of dealing with them has been to allow the neighbouring owners a certain sum by tender for keeping the pest under, the work to be done to the satisfaction of the local Inspector.

With reference to other blocks, the only available course open at present is to at once expend the necessary amount required for the purpose under the supervision of the Inspector. Were this plan not adopted a season for poisoning would be lost, and thus render in a great measure futile the endeavours of those landowners who are carrying on the work of extermination. In connection with this work sums of money have been authorized in various districts, and the Inspectors are instructed to proceed with the work as rapidly as possible.

I am of opinion that where unoccupied lands, available for depasturing purposes, but infested with rabbits, exist, and for which land occupiers can be obtained, the Government should where possible divest itself, *pro tem.*, of the ownership of such lands by letting them for grazing purposes for such term as would indemnify those taking them up for destroying the rabbits.

Poison.

To further assist the Inspectors in dealing with reserves, as well as to place the means of destruction within reach of those not readily able to obtain a supply, depôts for phosphorus have been established in each district, where poison can be obtained at a moderate cost. A machine for phosphorizing grain on the latest improved principle has been obtained from the Victorian Government, and others will be made on the same pattern, and each Rabbit Inspector furnished with one, and, if found as beneficial as reported, local manufacturers can supply the public.

Experiments on a small scale have also been instituted with other poisons in Otago, but sufficient time has not yet elapsed to obtain definite results. I may further add that I have this day received from Dunedin a description of an exterminator on a new principle: if it is only half as good as anticipated by the inventor it will certainly make the destruction of rabbits where burrows exist an easy task; it appears to have many advantages in its favour, and I think it is worthy of a fair trial.

Natural Enemies.

It having been generally admitted that the introduction of the natural enemy of the rabbit is the only thorough solution of the pest, endeavours have been made in that direction. Several shipments of ferrets have been procured from Melbourne, and small lots are expected regularly by sailing vessels from Great Britain.

It is proposed to establish breeding depôts in both Islands for the distribution of the animals on Crown lands. I am of opinion that the best results could be obtained by engaging the assistance where possible of the Acclimatization Societies to this end, every convenience to manage the affair properly being at their disposal.

Other enemies, such as the stoat and weasel may be introduced, if found practicable.

Dogs and Traps.

Using packs of dogs for the destruction of the rabbit has in many instances been found a greater plague than the rabbit itself. In my opinion they often help to distribute them throughout the country. In some places in the South Island dogs used for hunting the rabbits have gone wild, doing great damage amongst stock, as well as destroying ferrets and other natural enemies of the rabbits.

Trapping is also extensively carried on, especially in the summer season, when poisoning is not so efficacious. Although a great number of rabbits are destroyed by this process, it is open to objection, as many of the natural enemies of the rabbits are destroyed as well.

Reviewing the whole question it can be fairly reasoned that if, as admitted, under the late Rabbit Trusts a certain amount of success was obtained with what could only have been, at best, disunited action, with the waste lands of the Crown unprovided for, surely a greater success must be the result of more united efforts under the present organization, even if that is not as perfect as it might be. Good work is undoubtedly being done, but as the work proceeds many difficulties wholly unforeseen crop up. Some time must elapse before all can be thoroughly grappled with and provided for.

Circumstances requiring attention are continually arising, and information lately obtained tends to show that the pest is spreading still further. Petitions for, and counter-petitions against, declaring certain counties rabbit districts in South Canterbury have been received, and special inquiries are now being instituted to ascertain the true facts of the case. From the manner in which the pest is distributed more or less throughout the whole colony, it becomes a question whether it would not be wise to declare any county in which rabbits may be found a rabbit district at once, and, by adopting this course, immediately deal with the evil, instead of allowing valuable time to elapse before definite steps are taken. Hitherto, when districts have been proclaimed rabbit districts, it has been adopted more as a last resource and compulsory measure, rather than the expediency of prevention.

With experience gained by practice, other and cheaper means for destroying the pest will be discovered; still, for some years the pest will, I am afraid, be an annual tax on the landowner.

Since the Act of 1881 came into force, experience in working it has shown that it is surrounded with conditions that makes it difficult as well as expensive to administer, and its machinery is too complicated: too much, yet too little is left to both Bench and Inspector; consequently a great deal of dissatisfaction prevails.

I would suggest an amendment to the present Act, and will submit suggestions indicating proposed alterations.

It is only when all portions of the community realize that this pest affects one and all of them that unanimity of action can be expected. So long as under present conditions a certain portion of the community make a profit and living out of what is injuring the colony at large, so long will it be to their interest to farm the plague for their special benefit; yet the present steps taken must modify the evil to a great extent.

I have, &c.,

BENJ. P. BAYLY,

Superintending Inspector.

The Hon. Colonial Secretary, Wellington.

STATEMENT showing the RABBIT DISTRICTS constituted under "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1880," and Approximate Assets and Liabilities of the Trustees of such Districts when "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1881," came into force on 19th September, 1881.

Name of Rabbit District.	Date when Constituted.	Rateable Holdings under Act of 1880.	Rate levied.	Total Rate levied for Year 1880-81.	Amount Collected.	Amount in Arrear.	Other Debts Owing to the Trust.	Outstanding Liabilities.	Balance in Bank or in Hand.	Value of Phosphorus, &c., in Stock, at Cost Price.	Officers Employed, and Salary per Annum.
<i>North Island—</i>											
Awhaia	29 May, 1879	16	1s. p. 100 a.	£ s. d. 73 13 0	£ s. d. 36 16 6	£ s. d. 36 16 6	£ s. d. ...	£ s. d. 15 14 8	£ s. d. 1 17 10	£ ...	J. W. Smith, £60.
Otarua	12 Aug., 1879	22	9d. p. 100 a.	25 4 2	25 4 2	...	...	1 11 9	15 15 11	...	Ditto, £35.
Wainioru	12 Aug., 1879	60	½d. per acre	157 12 4	142 5 5	15 6 11	130 18 3	50 4 0	71 1 7	21 12 2	Ditto, £105; F. G. Moore, £20.
Castlepoint	4 Feb., 1880	50	½d. per acre	158 7 6	107 3 10	54 9 10	18 8 8	8 2 0	54 17 10	23 15 0	McHutchon, £150.
Carterton	9 Mar., 1880	291	½d. per acre	113 19 9	87 16 2	26 3 7	10 3 4	24 4 0	15 2 3	21 18 0	G. H. Gayfer, £60.
Masterton	18 May, 1880	384	½d. per acre	309 17 5	246 11 7	63 5 10	25 12 4	12 17 3	41 0 11	69 0 0	J. Harvey, jun., £150; F. G. Moore, £45.
Featherston	19 April, 1881	54	½d. per acre	46 19 9	46 9 4	0 10 5	...	...	28 18 10	...	J. W. Laimbeer, £25.
Palmerston North*	13 Sept., 1879	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Napier	26 Sept., 1879	...	...	756 4	1748 6 5	7 17 8	...	617 12 10	757 2 10	500 0 0	F. Russell, Ranger, £200; A. D. C. Inglis, Sec., £25.
<i>South Island—</i>											
Hokonui	21 July, 1877	...	½d. per acre	106 19 1	80 2 11	30 4 3	...	139 17 10	0 14 3	...	Inspector, £150.
West Oreti	21 July, 1877	...	½d. per acre	...	77 11 5	50 6 0	...	4 18 7	...	124 15 0	Ditto, £200.
Aparima	20 April, 1878	...	½d. per acre	...	89 12 11	31 8 5	...	6 5 0	10 12 0	...	Ditto and Clerk, £150.
Tapanui	9 July, 1878	...	...	...	61 12 2	...	...	116 14 10	...	...	...
Vincent	8 Nov., 1879	...	½d. per acre	542 13	1607 3 9	42 6 5	...	...	197 11 8	80 0 0	Inspector, £100.
Wallace	27 Jan., 1880	...	½d. per acre	154 2 3	65 4 9	88 17 6	...	102 12 9	2 1 3	...	...
Wyndham	29 June, 1880	...	½d. per acre	234 12	0113 19 7	120 12 5	1 0 6	47 9 8	11 0 11	...	...
Kaivera	13 July, 1880	...	½d. per acre	77 12 1	35 7 4½	42 4 8½	...	34 13 3	8 19 7½	...	Clerk, £15.
Tuturau	27 July, 1880	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Lake	21 Sept., 1880	...	½d. per acre	556 13 11	529 19 2½	39 3 2	...	...	102 9 0	...	Sec. and Insp., £300; Solicitor, £20; Returning Officer, £5.
Oware*	28 April, 1881	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Lammerlaw*	16 June, 1881	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Waitaki*	23 June, 1881	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Waikouaiti*	8 Sept., 1881	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

* No action taken.

