

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

II.—RABBITS.

WEDNESDAY, 10TH SEPTEMBER, 1884.

Mr. W. BEETHAM, examined.

1. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have you nothing to say, Mr. Beetham, as to rabbits?—They are a very great nuisance.

1A. *Mr. Buchanan.*] What is your opinion as to the best means of getting rid of the nuisance?—Ferrets, stoats, and weasels; I do not think that traps and rabbiters are the best means to use. We have killed upwards of 10,000 rabbits on a property lately purchased within three miles of Masterton, by destroying their cover. Dogs do not clear them all out of the warren. I prefer to trust to their natural enemies.

THURSDAY, 11TH SEPTEMBER, 1884 (Hon. Mr. G. R. JOHNSON, Chairman).

Mr. W. D. WOOD, examined.

1B. *Hon. the Chairman.*] I wish to ask you for some information in regard to the rabbit nuisance. Do you regard the working of the Act in this respect as satisfactory?—Yes.

2. You have a great number of rabbits on your run: Are they on the increase or decrease?—They are on the decrease.

3. How have they been so decreased?—With poison and ferrets.

4. Do you think that is the most satisfactory way of dealing with them?—I think it is the most satisfactory way.

5. Are you satisfied with the way the Act is carried out?—No; I think there ought to be some properly-defined method of carrying it out. There is no uniform system adopted. The Superintendents or Sub-Superintendents (I do not know what to call them) adopt different systems.

6. Then you have more than one person acting as Inspector or Sub-Inspector in the district?—Yes.

7. Do you think that is not satisfactory?—I think the Inspectors ought to recognize some definite method of destroying rabbits. For instance, some Inspectors insist on using traps and rabbiters to exterminate rabbits; others say that poison or ferrets is the best means.

8. That is, while one recommends poison or some other means, another encourages some other plan?—Yes. Where ferrets are turned out it is a suicidal policy to catch rabbits with traps, for you must destroy your ferrets in the same traps. On my property and the adjoining property it was insisted that rabbiters and traps should be used. In the course of seventeen days fifteen ferrets were trapped.

9. Of course they were killed?—Yes; the ferrets were killed. Besides, rabbiters are somewhat hostile to ferrets. They consider the ferrets interfere with their means of living. They kill them if they can, because they consider they take away their means of living.

10. Do you recommend that one uniform method should be adopted through the whole of a district, and that should be by poisoning?—Yes; with ferrets and cats and the natural enemies of the rabbit.

11. Have you turned out many ferrets in your district?—Yes; about a hundred a year. Mr. Bullen turns out 200 every year. Mr. Bullen will not allow a rabbit on his place. The rabbit will only stay on the ground while he can earn good wages. After that, he says "It does not answer my purpose to remain," and he goes away. In my opinion rabbits will never be exterminated by employing rabbiters and traps.

Hon. Mr. Campbell: I quite agree with you.

12. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you know whether ferrets increase in a wild state?—I believe they do. We have found on our place a nest with five or six young ferrets in it. Ferrets also travel a good way. I have a cage in which about forty ferrets are being reared. One night a young ferret walks up: he went in with the others and could not get out again. He was at first quite wild. We had him a week or two, after which he was turned out with the others.

13. Have you tried weasels or stoats?—I have not.

14. *Hon. Sir G. S. Whitmore.*] How about the mongoose?—Mr. Bullen got out some mongooses: a whole family of them. One of them escaped, and he then let the others out. I do not know how they would act.

15. The mongoose comes from a different climate. It is a question whether he could stand the cold. Is there any evidence of the ferret doing injury to sheep?—Not that I am aware of.

16. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have you any amendment in the Act, or as to the working of the Act, to offer, beyond those which you have already referred to?—I think not.

17. *Hon. Mr. Waterhouse.*] Is the injury done by rabbits sufficient to affect the amount of feed upon your run?—Not now to any extent. When I went there first there was not a blade of grass to be seen in some places; they had destroyed it all. We have destroyed about one hundred thousand.

18. Are you put to expense now by the rabbit-pest?—Yes.

19. How many men do you employ?—Only a few men.

20. The rabbit will not take the poison if laid on the dry ground?—My experience is that they will take it always if laid on their feeding-ground. They have taken it when the phosphorus has even set fire to the grass.

21. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have you tried rhodium?—Yes, we have tried rhodium and sugar; we have mixed them. My son finds no difference whether it is mixed with sugar or not; they seemed to eat it as well one way as the other.