

numerous?—I think the destructive habits of the ferret have been made too much of. We have had ferrets for years, and we never lost but one fowl; and not only that, but there was an immense number of ferrets about.

440. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Do you believe that the local administration of the Act—that is, its administration by local bodies, such as County Councils for instance, would be better than the present system of administration?—No; I do not think that would work at all.

441. Is it your opinion that, within a reasonable time, the rabbit pest may be reduced within limits, so that it will not involve any injury to the public?—I think if rabbiters were done away with a sufficient number of the natural enemies would solve the whole difficulty in five years; but if you have rabbiters they will destroy the natural enemies. I have known places for the last two years which were once swarming with rabbits. Nothing has been done there in the shape of poisoning; yet there have been no young ones seen, and the old ones have gone away. It was the ferret that did that.

442. *Hon. Capt. Fraser.*] Then you believe that poisoning, without rabbiters, and after the poisoning, ferrets would be sufficient. What about the dogs?—The dog nuisance is as bad as the rabbits. Dogs have gone wild in all parts of the country.

MONDAY, 29TH SEPTEMBER, 1884.

Mr. HUGH BELLIS, examined.

443. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Can you tell the Committee anything as to the methods of getting rid of the rabbit pest?—I am sorry to say that rabbits are greatly on the increase in my part of the district. I do not see the necessity for keeping so many Inspectors going about the country. Instead of keeping a lot of men with packs of dogs, I think if every one commenced to poison about the month of May they would do more good than by keeping so many men and dogs.

444. Do they send many dogs?—No; but they are very often about with them.

445. With dogs?—Yes.

446. What kind of dogs?—I cannot say; but they are enough for sheep-worrying.

447. How many?—About three.

448. Dogs?—Yes.

449. And the Inspector?—He comes through to see that you keep on till you destroy the rabbits.

450. Why do you object to it?—I object to them and their going about the run. Some time ago they caused a disturbance between me and them. They are a greater nuisance than the rabbits.

451. Do you do anything to put down the pest?—Yes; I have poisoned; I have also put on men and dogs. I received a notice from the Inspector saying that I should poison a portion of my land which I had already poisoned. This was a narrow strip of land near Castlepoint boundary-fence, about three chains from the river. It is very rough there. The Inspector rides along, and there he sees a good many rabbits. The average width from the fence to the river is about four chains.

452. *Hon. Captain Fraser.*] Whose property is it?—A portion of it is mine; a portion belongs to Johnston and Company.

453. *Hon. Mr. Waterhouse.*] Can you tell me whether ferrets have made their way?—We are breeding some and waiting to turn them out. I was not very well satisfied with the way the Inspectors were doing the work, and I went to the office to see their diaries: the Rabbit Inspector keeps a diary. It was refused.

454. Is there any power to inspect the diary, given under the Act?—I thought they were compelled to let me see it.

455. Have you power to demand an inspection of it?—I thought I had, but it appears that I had not.

456. *Hon. Captain Fraser.*] Are they ordered to keep a diary?—I believe so; they get paid by the day.

Mr. C. COWAN, M.H.R., examined.

457. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You have had great experience of the rabbit pest?—Yes; I have.

458. Will you state your experience regarding it: but let me first ask whether, in your opinion, you think the Rabbit Act is working satisfactorily or otherwise?—I have been settled in the Southland District for twenty-six years, and the country I occupied was about the first visited by rabbits—on the coast, at a spot situated about forty miles from where we knew they were before. In 1872 it was that I discovered rabbits so far inland. In the course of three years they overran the entire country. They had complete possession, and we could see then that they were gradually making their way north. The first step we took in the district was to carry out the Rabbit Trusts Act. The Government, as you know, afterwards took over that department and combined it with the Sheep Department. From my experience I should say that, had the Government been efficiently represented by appointments properly filled, the machinery would have been adequate to bring about the desired end, and kept the pest within reasonable bounds. In our district we are very much dissatisfied with the conduct of the Rabbit Department.

459. At the present time?—At the present time. Of the Sheep Department we have no reason to complain, for we have been clear of scab for fifteen or sixteen years. Our great objection to the conduct of the Rabbit Department is that Tom, Dick, and Harry are taken into its employment without any reference to fitness or efficiency. Just to show you how this is, I shall give you an instance, from which you may conclude that the prejudice against the department in the district has not been unwarranted. One of the Sub-Inspectors had been previously a pieman and fishmonger. He was a friend of my predecessor, and assisted my predecessor in his canvass. Soon after that