

Sess. II.—1884.  
NEW ZEALAND.

# THE RABBIT NUISANCE

(ANNUAL REPORT ON), BY THE SUPERINTENDING INSPECTOR.

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*

Mr. B. P. BAYLY to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR —

Wellington, 2nd June, 1884.

I have the honour to furnish my annual report upon the rabbit nuisance, steps taken, and results obtained, for the year 1883-84.

The amended Act of 1882 having been in operation for two years, its utility or otherwise may now be fairly judged, and I submit that the results shown by the reports attached prove the unmistakable benefit that has been derived principally from this measure, and is a guarantee of its efficacy.

During the past year, as heretofore, the great stumbling-block has been the numerous reserves throughout the colony in rabbit districts; and again I would strongly impress upon the Government the absolute necessity of letting for grazing any of these areas available for that purpose. These blocks are a continual tax on the department, both in labour and expenditure, and invariably afford an excuse to owners bounded by them for whatever rabbits they may have on their properties, the reserves always being assigned the credit of being breeding-places, from which the other properties are overrun. With the exception of the very small blocks and bush reserves, nearly all could advantageously be disposed of, and both State and department relieved of this constant expenditure. There are at present about 350,000 acres of reserves of different descriptions, varying in area from ten to thousands of acres, the clearing of which devolves upon the State.

To effectually deal with these lands that have been set aside for certain purposes, and persistently neglected by those who are beneficially interested in them, it becomes a question whether they should not be declared abandoned lands, then be let for such periods as the case might necessitate, on the condition that the tenant cleared them thoroughly of rabbits, and at the expiration of such tenure they might again revert to the original purpose for which they were set aside. There are other portions of the waste lands of the Crown that can never be dealt with except by the natural enemy. I refer to that country west of the River Waiau (south) to Te Anau Lake, thence to Lakes Wakatipu and Wanaka; in fact, comprising the western watershed of the South Island to the Mackenzie Country in Canterbury. The greater part of this country is unknown and inaccessible, but the river- and creek-beds afford occasionally warm gullies and grass, where the pest increases in safety, and again inundates the occupied country to the southward and eastward of this watershed, and should the Canterbury country ever be inundated with the pest it will be from this quarter.

With a view to stock the margin of this inaccessible country with the natural enemy an endeavour is being made to introduce the stoat and weasel for that purpose, and an agent sent Home to procure them. It has been proved by Mr. Rich, of Palmerston South, that they can be imported, and the same man who brought his out has been engaged by the Government; and, as a certain amount of success attended Mr. Rich's efforts where a sailing-vessel was the means of transit, better success may be anticipated by utilizing one of the large steamers now trading to these ports, and the result of this venture should be soon determined.

During the past year nearly 4,000 ferrets have been bred and turned out by private individuals. Marlborough heads the list with 3,041, bred and turned out there, and over 800 were liberated on one run alone. It is still a moot point whether the ferret will do equally as well over all parts of the colony. The weight of evidence is decidedly favourable to the supposition that when turned out in sufficient numbers their utility is unquestionable. Mr. Bullen, of Kaikoura, who first adopted the ferret as a means of coping with the rabbit, has been so far successful that at present he employs no rabbiters, and his run is officially reported to be remarkably free from the pest, so much so that the man who is employed to breed ferrets by Mr. Bullen states that he has a difficulty in getting sufficient rabbits to supply those on hand. By papers attached it will be seen that even far south they are found in considerable numbers, and in some places are said to be doing good work, but as yet cannot have increased enough or sufficient time elapsed since their liberation for any positive conclusion to be arrived at as to actual results; but, wherever the ferrets have been systematically used, the preponderance of evidence is decidedly in favour of this remedy. Where-