

NAPIER DISTRICT.

THE Board's Inspectors report that rabbits are being well kept down, active measures being taken by hunting and trapping. The hunting is, no doubt, the cause of their having spread on to many properties where they were not before. The fence on the southern boundary has been of immense assistance in keeping the rabbits back. During the winter poison will be laid on many properties. The Board intend employing a man to go round and show the settlers how to mix and lay it. Stoats and weasels have been seen in many parts of the district, having come from the Wairarapa.

Napier, 17th July, 1891.

R. C. PASLEY, Inspector.

WELLINGTON—WEST COAST DISTRICT.

THIS year has again unfortunately been most favourable to the increase of rabbits. There has been an entire absence of those winter and spring floods which are of immense assistance in destroying large numbers of rabbits. As a matter of fact they have been breeding during the whole of the past year.

Speaking generally, the settlers, aided with the natural enemy in the shape of stoats, weasels, ferrets, cats, and hawks, have been successful in reducing the number of rabbits, but there are a few places in the North and South Wairarapa Subdivisions where they are still too numerous.

Since my last report, parts of the North and South Wairarapa have been constituted a rabbit district under "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1886," and the management placed under a Board of Trustees. This Board was constituted at a somewhat unfortunate time of the year—about May last, and the delay caused by the change in the control of affairs from this department to the Trustees, happening as it did just at the commencement of the poisoning season, placed this part of the district in an unfavourable position. I am glad, however, to be able to state that at the end of the year there was good evidence that the Board intended to insist on early and effectual steps being taken within its district to cope with the pest.

In the Wairarapa Subdivisions stoats and weasels have been imported and liberated in considerable numbers. There have been altogether 397 stoats and 1,324 weasels liberated. This has been undertaken partly by a syndicate and partly by the Rabbit Board, assisted by the Government subsidy. Of the total number introduced, the syndicate liberated 127 stoats and 722 weasels, and the Board 270 stoats and 602 weasels. Two of the Board's shipments suffered great loss, the numbers landed alive in both these instances being very small, and the survivors in delicate health. This is attributed to shipping them at a wrong season.

I have definite information from reliable sources that the weasels, at all events, are beginning to breed, although I am not aware that any nests have been discovered, but several old weasels have been seen with litters. That they have spread over a large area is evidenced by the fact that on the West Coast, where none have been liberated, a considerable number have been seen. I have every reason to believe that the natural enemy is doing good work, but, of course, it is unreasonable to suppose that they can make much impression in diminishing the number of rabbits without the aid of other means for some time to come; I am, however, of opinion that when once they become acclimatised, having ample supplies of food, they will breed rapidly. Inspectors and agents still have considerable trouble in getting owners of land to exercise sufficient care in mixing and laying poison, and in following this up by other means of destruction. Agents are directed to give every assistance in instructing settlers as to the best means of mixing and laying the poison; but in most instances, as soon as an agent's back is turned, the owner's chief aim seems to be to get the poisoned grain scattered in the shortest time possible, utterly regardless of the result.

I have to direct your attention to the necessity of relieving the department from the duty which at present devolves on it of keeping the rabbits down on Crown lands; this can best be done by disposing of them in some way. I would recommend that where the land is of poor quality, such as settlers do not care to acquire or pay rent for, some arrangement should be made for its occupation rent free, as at present these lands are costing the Government a large sum of money annually, and occupy a large amount of the time of the Inspectors and agents, and still continue to be a source of annoyance to adjoining owners.

Wellington, 11th July, 1891.

J. DRUMMOND, Inspector.

MARLBOROUGH—NELSON DISTRICT.

NEARLY all infested country is under the jurisdiction of the Awatere Rabbit Board, and good work was done on the runs last winter by poisoning, trapping, &c., and was followed up in the spring on many stations by digging-out, shooting, and using Staveley's paste. Trapping for the factories on the low country and poisoning on the high commenced again in March, and is still being carried on. There are still the same blocks of unoccupied Crown lands as last year to be dealt with—about 140,000 acres. A good deal of wire-netting is being erected on many of the runs, and 700 ferrets and 307 stoats and weasels have been turned out by the Awatere Rabbit Board.

Blenheim, 30th May, 1891.

T. G. RICHARDSON, Inspector.

CANTERBURY—KAIKOURA DISTRICT.

SOUTH of the Tasman River rabbits continue to increase owing to the influx from the Otago country and the want of natural enemies.

Between the Waitaki and the Hakateramea portion of the rabbit-fence there is no increase. The country is now placed by the owners in charge of Inspector Thomson for the purpose of systematically poisoning the whole block, irrespective of boundaries, the owners paying all cost. It is believed that this course will result in reducing the pest to a minimum.

The Tekapo-Waitaki Islands have been dealt with, and the rabbits much reduced.