

In Canterbury, between the rabbit-fences, rabbits have increased in a few spots owing to the spread of gorse and to the dry season; these, however, have at once been dealt with when reported.

North of the Hurunui Board's fence, near the sea, the rabbits have not increased, and the Kaikoura District still continues in a very satisfactory state, owing, it is believed, mainly to the ferrets and other vermin. Inland, however, the position is not so satisfactory.

Between the Clarence and the Waiau a number of rabbiters have been employed, but although they have undoubtedly done good work, the rabbits are not exterminated—they have only been checked for a time. Unless further fencing is erected to protect the country at the head of the Hope and Hurunui Rivers Canterbury stands in danger from the silver-grey rabbit. The south fence I look upon as an absolute security to Canterbury, and there are now fewer rabbits inside the fence than when it was erected.

Inspector H. S. Thomson reports as follows:—

There seems to me to be a marked diminution in the number of rabbits on Glentanner and the upper portion of Rhoborough Downs (west side Tasman River and Lake Pukaki), and this decrease I take to be largely due to the presence of the natural enemy—stoats and weasels—a considerable number of which were liberated on that ground about three years since. It is reported to me that stoats and weasels, especially the former, are frequently seen on Glentanner, and rabbits found killed by them. Their being so often seen shows that they must have increased greatly, and must now be in considerable numbers. For some time I have thought there was some agency at work on Glentanner keeping the rabbits in check, and I now feel convinced that the natural enemy is that cause.

The rabbit-fence is still acting as a satisfactory barrier against the advance of rabbits into South Canterbury, there being a marked difference between the number of rabbits outside and the few to be found on the inside of the fence. On the outside poisoning has had to be universally adopted, whilst inside it has not been found necessary to resort to it. In two or three instances, on the inside, poison has, by my advice, been laid on rough, scrubby places, where a few rabbits have existed for years, and where, from the nature of the country, it has been found very difficult to get at them by the usual means of dogging and shooting.

Christchurch, 22nd May, 1891.

R. FOSTER, Inspector.

#### OTAGO DISTRICT.

THE absence of heavy rains and flooded streams mentioned in my last annual report has continued to the present time over the greater portion of Otago, consequently it has been a continuous struggle to keep the pest in check. Rabbits were breeding (more or less) throughout the winter, and many landowners have stated that they never before had so much difficulty in keeping down the increase on the low country; on the other hand the reports of both Inspectors and private individuals are unanimous in stating that the high country is very free of the pest, and for many years past there has not been such good feed.

Poisoning operations were generally successful, but barely one-half the number of skins were picked up on the purely pastoral country as there was last year; consequently the very large increase in the number of skins exported—namely, 3,011,219—must be accounted for by the extra efforts made on the river banks and low country adjacent.

Several tinning factories have been established during the last year; and whilst, no doubt, excellent work in the destruction of rabbits is performed during the season, the price then paid for rabbits is so good that it is a very great inducement to preserve the rabbits throughout the summer when they are of little or no value, and great difficulty is often experienced in getting thorough poisoning done, all sorts of schemes being adopted to hoodwink the Inspectors.

During the year 1,964 ferrets have been liberated by the Government principally in the high and broken country from Lake Wakatipu to Lake Ohau. Every effort has also been made to popularise the use of working ferrets, by giving or loaning two or three to any farmer's son who could be trusted. Two thousand one hundred ferrets have also been liberated by private breeders. Only nine stoats have been imported into Otago during the year.

Good reports continue to reach me of the work done by the natural enemies turned out in previous years. Inspector Corbett says very little poisoning will be required up the Hunter River this winter. Ferrets are now found in every part of Otago; and stoats or weasels are occasionally seen many miles from places where liberated.

All the Inspectors complain of the very serious injury done by gorse and broom being allowed to spread on mining reserves, river banks, district roads, &c.

Dunedin, 29th April, 1891.

ALFRED DOUGLASS, Inspector.