

SESS. II.—1891.  
NEW ZEALAND.

THE RABBIT NUISANCE.

(ANNUAL REPORTS OF INSPECTORS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 1891.)

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

SIR,—  
Live Stock Department, Wellington, 31st July, 1891.  
I have the honour to hand you herewith the Annual Reports for the different districts of the colony for the year ending 31st March, 1891.  
I have, &c.,  
JOHN D. RITCHIE,  
Chief Inspector.  
The Hon. J. McKenzie, Minister of Lands and Agriculture.

AUCKLAND DISTRICT.

THE statement herewith, showing the number of rabbit-skins brought in to Kihikihi during the year ended the 31st March, 1890, and the same month of 1891, is forwarded to you for your information. It is also divided into two parts, for, owing to some alteration in the price paid per skin, the Maoris were not working to any extent during April to August, 1889, the whole period cannot be used for purposes of comparison.

The nine months of 1889-90 and the same period ending the 31st March, 1891, shows an increase of 11,337. This increase may perhaps be considered comparatively reassuring, for, judging by other parts of the colony, a much more alarming increase would certainly have been realised. It would almost appear from this that the rabbit will not develop here into the devastating plague that it once was in the South.

The breed of the rabbit here is said to be not identical with that of the rabbit in other parts of the colony, but in appearance they are certainly alike, except that the King-country rabbit is somewhat smaller than those in the south. To some extent the plan (Redier's) of killing only females is put into effect, for the Maoris kill chiefly by digging out, so that of grown skins they get more females than males. I am still of opinion that the absence of the natural grasses is the chief reason that the rabbit has not increased here as it has done in other districts in New Zealand.

A check has been put on the Maoris hunting over European's lands partly by those among them who fear that the bonus may be stopped, and partly by certain Maoris who when so hunting were found, and whose skins were refused when offered for sale.

Attention has been directed to the most menacing aspect of the rabbit, its approach to the better grassed and more valuable lands near Te Kuiti, and on the larger properties about Cambridge owners are taking means to kill off the rabbits on their lands. But, except in the King-country, rabbits can scarcely be said to be spreading; they are more noticed because settlers' attention is being more directed to them, but rabbits or their traces can be found practically over the whole district, but nowhere in any number.

Auckland, 6th April, 1891. E. CLIFTON, Inspector.

STATEMENT showing Rabbit-skins Purchased from the Natives in the Waikato during the Financial Years 1889-90 and 1890-91.

1889.				1890.			
April 17	...	...	3,420	April 15	...	...	2,391
May 25	...	...	781	May 13	...	...	4,422
June 12	...	...	545	June 10	...	...	1,805
July 10	...	...	1,070	July 8	...	...	4,311
Aug. 7	...	...	56	Aug. 5	...	...	3,837
			5,872				16,766
Sept. 4	...	...	5,740	Sept. 2	...	...	11,102
Oct. 2	...	...	15,565	Sept. 30	...	...	11,217
Oct. 30	...	...	18,651	Oct. 28	...	...	17,593
Nov. 27	...	...	18,989	Nov. 25	...	...	24,736
Dec. 23	...	...	16,786	Dec. 23	...	...	17,517
1890.				1891.			
Jan. 29	...	...	9,989	Jan. 20	...	...	10,756
Feb. 18	...	...	5,611	Feb. 17	...	...	5,823
Mar. 18	...	...	5,552	Mar. 18	...	...	9,476
			96,883				108,220

Increase, 11,337.

## 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.

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.

APPENDIX.

COMPARATIVE STATEMENT of the Number and Value of Rabbit-skins exported from the Colony during the Years ended the 31st March, 1884, to 1891.

District.	Number.								Value.							
	1884.	1885.	1886.	1887.	1888.	1889.	1890.	1891.	1884.	1885.	1886.	1887.	1888.	1889.	1890.	1891.
Auckland ..	..	..	229,000	..	1,468	3,336	5,309	..	£	..	2,182	..	12	33	46	..
Wellington ..	706,894	889,436	1,240,223	544,712	337,988	313,441	583,198	512,373	7,901	9,220	12,550	4,325	3,428	2,671	4,299	3,732
Blenheim ..	..	68,736	..	..	87,716	460,479	700,471	730,780	..	848	..	..	972	5,228	7,474	7,467
Lyttelton ..	1,745,954	1,525,730	2,308,650	3,689,982	762,556	198,876	37,848	86,798	16,491	15,728	22,252	24,544	6,147	1,253	331	878
Oamaru ..	..	24,534	121,135	17,170	52,700	57,240	152,550	132,680	..	256	1,009	163	440	480	1,339	1,407
Dunedin ..	6,514,884	7,014,993	4,787,600	4,376,228	9,986,752	10,801,641	7,929,493	9,538,272	67,055	79,242	42,217	35,375	85,842	81,795	66,256	83,891
Bluff ..	924,609	345,636	205,764	272,600	896,691	750,448	876,820	2,308,130	9,230	3,346	1,637	1,839	11,388	6,141	7,416	21,090
Other ports	..	..	..	..	..	7,716	9,528	3,540	..	..	..	..	..	31	57	22
Totals ..	9,892,341	9,869,065	8,892,372	8,900,692	12,125,871	12,593,177	10,295,217	13,312,573	100,677	108,640	81,847	66,246	108,229	97,632	87,218	118,487

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