

places, and in placing this attraction at the same value as the shooting licenses—£1,393 per annum—it will be quite a good estimate. The total of these estimates discloses the fact that the value of the deer herds in the Dominion is approximately £6,965—say, £7,000—per annum.

CAUSE OF DETERIORATION AMONG SOME HERDS.

There are several factors contributing towards the cause of deterioration in some of the large herds. Firstly, deer have been introduced into a country where there is an absence of natural enemies—strong and weak are alike able to live—the law of the “survival of the fittest” does not apply. In fact, the reverse is the case—the strongest and best developed stags are those shot; and, excepting in cases where rigorous culling is carried out, it is the weaker stags that head the herds, which must naturally sooner or later reflect on the standard of the whole herd. In-breeding has no doubt contributed largely; but by far the greatest factor is that resulting from overstocking, with its consequent lack of adequate food-supply. It is a well-known fact that the best heads are always obtained where there is most feed. As the feed is reduced the heads become smaller in proportion, although, generally speaking, quite regular in stature.

An adequate example of the effect of feed on the size of the head is to be found in the fallow herd of the Blue Mountains. Some years ago this herd became so numerous, had deteriorated to such an extent, and had become such a nuisance to neighbouring farmers that protection was taken off a large portion of the run. In the general shooting which followed hundreds of deer, both strong and weak, were killed, and the herd was greatly reduced in size, leaving more feed for the remainder. I was informed by a local resident prominent in acclimatization circles that under this indiscriminate shooting the standard of the herd has improved immensely, and whereas a few years ago good heads were conspicuous by their absence, the last season some good specimens were taken.

From this example it appears to me that the first step in the rejuvenation of a deer herd is a rigid thinning.

HABITS AND FOOD.

The animal is more or less nocturnal in its habits; it feeds in the late afternoon, night, and early morning, and retires to quiet undisturbed places to sleep through the heat of the day. It feeds on practically anything eaten by domesticated stock—grass, farm crops, and in the forests the palatable species of scrub and young trees. When feed is in short supply it will, however, eat almost anything, and will live where domesticated stock would die. Great distances are travelled through the night in search of food, and the animal, being mischievous in nature, often destroys far more than it eats. It is very fond of gambolling about also, and this habit causes some trouble among ewes and lambs.

THE EFFECT ON THE INDUSTRY OF AGRICULTURE.

Although my investigation was primarily intended to deal with the relation of deer to the production of timber crops, it soon became apparent that the effect on the sister industry—agriculture—was probably as great, and this report would not be complete without some reference to that phase of the question.

Practically all the herds of the Dominion are on or are contiguous to land used in pastoral or agricultural pursuits, and the damage done on this land has assumed in some cases a distinct menace to the industry. Crops are often ruined in a wholesale manner, large numbers of stock displaced, and the production of others lowered. I will give you some instances to show that this is general. A few days were spent in the Lillburn-Tuatapere district, in Southland; the land is contiguous to large areas of forest country which border on the National Park, and deer are numerous. It is becoming impossible to grow crops. Grain crops are grazed on, trampled down, and even when in the stook are not immune, the sheaves being tossed in all directions and destroyed. Turnip crops are grazed often before they are ready, the bulbs broken, and in some cases rows are pulled up in a spirit of mischief and left to rot. One instance was quoted to me of a settler last season sowing 50 acres of grass on a new bush-burn. Deer started to feed on it before it was ready to graze, the result being that the pasture was for the most part ruined. The seriousness of this is apparent when it is remembered that the only possible chance of getting a “take” of grass on bush country is on the new ash.

Farmers stated that their loss among ewes and lambs through deer playing about among them at lambing-time was considerable. One estimated his reduction in lambs at 30 per cent. They are very emphatic on the question, stating that from their point of view deer are comparable to the rabbit, with the added disadvantages that they are impossible or prohibitive to fence against; they travel great distances to carry out their depredations, which, occurring at night-time, are impossible to guard against. This condition of affairs is general.

Accompanying this report are photographs of a turnip crop at Lake Hawea partially ruined, and off which over 130 head of deer have been shot. Another photograph shows a crop of oats in the Wangapeka Valley, Nelson, in which the owner placed scarecrows and tied his dogs to stakes. Deer grazed to within a few feet of the dogs and scarecrows, and the crop was ruined. At Rotorua farmers have estimated their annual losses at from £50 upwards, and these estimates are conservative. Land in this district is light, pumiceous in nature, and grows splendid crops of turnips and grass, but