

EGMONT NATIONAL PARK BOARD.

(T. C. LIST, Chairman.)

During the past twelve months the Egmont National Park Board has continued to carry out its duties of conservation and administration over the area comprised in the Egmont National Park, and although good work has been done, the activities of the Board have been considerably curtailed, owing to the necessity of conserving its funds in view of the uncertainty of the financial position in the future.

Valuable financial assistance was again available from the trustees of the estate of R. C. Bruce, to the extent of £250, by way of grant. This sum is made available conditional on it being expended on afforestation or the making of tracks, and conditional also on a like amount being contributed by local bodies surrounding the mountain.

The local bodies now realize the enormous importance of the work of the Egmont National Park Board to the Province of Taranaki generally, and contributions have been made as in former years. The funds derived from local-body contributions are allocated to the various local committees to assist in the essential work of the committees in maintaining tracks and houses. In view of the financial assistance received in this manner, it is possible for the Egmont National Park Board to apply its funds derived from the opossum royalties and sale of trapping-rights, together with any grant received from the Government, to carry on the work of the extermination of goats, so vital to the preservation of the Native flora on Mount Egmont. In addition, the mountain is ranged for trespassing cattle, illicit trapping of opossums, removal of timber, and destruction of Native bird life.

The sale of dead timber has yielded a small financial return to the Park Board over the past twelve months, and this phase of the Board's operations is under the direct control of an officer to ensure that the true principles of conservation are adhered to, and only dead timber is permitted to be removed.

For the period under review 1,291 goats have been destroyed, making a total of 4,280 altogether destroyed since the commencement of operations three years ago. Although the total elimination of this menace will take some years to effect, very good work has already been done and many acres of Native forest, which were totally denuded of undergrowth, are now showing rapid regeneration and, provided the work is carried out continuously, the conservation of the forest will be assured.

A number of goats are still reported to exist on the Pouakai Ranges, although these ranges have been worked over on several occasions. The Kaitake Ranges have been gone over again this season, and it appears evident that a number of the animals work in from neighbouring farms during the winter period.

It is particularly pleasing to note that the undergrowth is developing again in a very marked degree over areas which were definitely menaced a few years ago, and this is most encouraging to all those who have the interests of our Native flora at heart.

The Board has a very great responsibility in respect of the adequate fencing of the park lands against the neighbouring farms surrounding the mountain. The completion of fencing in many places is the only solution to prevention of trespass from wandering stock, and it is hoped in future years to direct more attention to this essential part of the Board's programme of work.

Legislation.—A draft amending Bill dealing with certain phases of the Board's work and its relations with the various committees, and also dealing with matters relating to the keeping of accounts and the auditing of same, has been prepared, and is being submitted for parliamentary action during the coming session.

Afforestation.—A total area of 255½ acres has now been planted on the northern slopes of the Kaitake Ranges between Oakura and Tataraimake. The trees consist principally of *Pinus radiata*, which had to be planted to suppress the tremendous growth of gorse, blackberry, and ragwort, which was previously the subject of constant complaint from the farmers in this district. Other trees planted are *Cupressus macrocarpa*, *Eucalyptus* (the principal varieties being *fastigata*, *maidenii*, *Macarthuri*, *botryoides*, and *viminialis*), *Acacia decurrens* variety *mollis*, and a very small number of *Sequoia sempervirens* (Californian redwood) and *Abies Douglasii* (Douglas fir). The latter two varieties have been planted in a moist valley known as Lucy's Gully, which is surrounded by Native forest. The acacia have been planted with the object of supplying future needs for posts of the Egmont National Park Board.

The whole planted area is very conspicuous from the Main South Road, and it elicits much favourable comment from the neighbouring farmers and those visiting the district. This plantation is a splendid example of weed-suppression, as the area was formerly covered in dense gorse, fern, blackberry, ragwort, &c., and with approximately three more years' growth, the whole area should be fully clothed with forest growth, and complete suppression of weeds assured.

A further very important point in this connection is the protection afforded the Native forest behind the plantation. In previous years the forest-line was inclined to recede owing to occasional fires, but with the protection now afforded, the Native forest is making rapid growth and development along with the newly planted areas of exotic trees.

By-laws and Letters of Delegation to Local Committees.—New by-laws have been gazetted and letters of delegation of certain powers of the Board to the various local committees are now in operation, and their effect in the effective administration of the Board is already noticeable.

Local Committees.—The various local committees have again co-operated with the Board in catering for the many thousands of visitors to the park, but, owing to the financial slump experienced during the year, the admission charges and house fees show a decrease as compared with the returns for the previous year.