

The only other plantation fire was caused by a change of wind during land-clearing operations adjoining Blue Mountains Plantation, Otago. Through the strenuous efforts of the workmen the fire was extinguished before much damage was done, and was confined to a number of patches within an area of 45 acres.

In North Auckland a fire scorched about 100 acres of six-year-old trees in a private commercial plantation, and in Canterbury another private afforestation company suffered to the extent of about £2,350, 360 acres of trees being destroyed. Severe losses were also sustained by certain local bodies in the same province, the total acreage burned under this head being 236, valued at £2,100.

In Rotorua Region four small fires in the indigenous forest were suppressed without damage to the standing timber. Three of these were due to sparks from a sawmill locomotive.

An equal number of fires was reported from Wellington Region, the most serious of which occurred at Tongaporutu, Taranaki, where 250 acres of second growth in a forest reserve were burned over.

In Nelson the season was dry, but owing to good periodic rains the fire danger was not exceptional. Eleven minor fires were detected in State forests, but none was serious.

Conditions in Westland Region were also favourable from a fire point of view, and no fires in State forests were reported.

In Southland five fires occurred in old workings and burned 126 acres of cut-over bush, but generally the fire danger was normal.

Although not so numerous as heretofore, cases still occur throughout the Dominion of fires being lighted in fire districts during the closed season—*i.e.*, the summer months—without a permit, as required by the Forests Act. Legal action is taken against the offender in every case where definite proof is obtainable, as it is felt that only by such publicity can the gravity of this offence be brought home to the general public.

During the year the most flagrant case of illegal fire-lighting occurred at Conical Hills (Otago), where, despite a prominently displayed warning notice, a party of visitors entered the plantation and lit a fire which might have been attended with disastrous results. The offence was promptly detected, and the offenders were subsequently convicted and fined.

#### *Fire Districts.*

Since last report one new fire district has been constituted, to safeguard the plantation now being established in the Tairua-Whangamata district, and the boundaries of two existing districts were extended. This brings the total number of fire districts to forty-two, and the area covered to nearly one-quarter of a million acres.

The total number of private fire districts is the same as quoted in last year's report—*viz.*, eight.

Reports from the various regions indicate that fire districts are still proving an effective method of control, and to this fact, combined with the "prevent forest fires" propaganda carried out in the past, is due in a measure at least the comparative immunity from serious fires enjoyed by the State forests in recent years.

In the main, however, the price of this freedom is, and must always be, eternal vigilance on the part of all field officers during the dry months of the year.

### 8. WILD LIFE IN STATE FORESTS.

A natural result of the scarcity of funds has been a curtailment of the extensive campaign against animal pests inaugurated in 1931. Notwithstanding depleted appropriations, however, the tally for the year is 32,000, chiefly rabbits and hares. In addition to this checked tally, there is the uncountable total of rabbits destroyed by intensive poisoning with phosphorus, and the further 7,162 deer-tails collected on behalf of the Department of Internal Affairs.

A disconcerting feature of this side of the work is the increasing evidence against the opossum as a pest in exotic pine forests. It noticeably favours certain pine species to the exclusion of others, and it became necessary to obtain a special permit to deal with this animal in certain areas, although a general close season was being observed.

Four hundred were killed under this provision, and the very low price of what would two years ago have been a valuable parcel of skins made the operation a dead loss, except from the forest-protection viewpoint. Present indications are that the opossum is detrimental to *Pinus ponderosa* stands of all ages.

The residue of deer-hides from the 1930 campaign was satisfactorily disposed of, some of them furnishing the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research with sample material, which was appreciatively received on the British market and helped to open up a promising channel of disposal. Favourable reference to these hides and their commercial value and properties has been made in the reports of the Imperial Institute.