

The country lent itself admirably to the system of "drives" which were found so efficacious in the Hunter Valley the previous season. Small drives conducted by two men up to large ones by six men, resulted in kills of from thirty to two hundred deer. As the Makarora and Hunter Valleys run parallel and are separated by a range over which deer pass freely in summer and autumn, it was found desirable to extend the operations by having another party in the Hunter Valley co-operating with that in the Makarora. Two extra men were, therefore, engaged just before the close of the official year, making a total of eight; these were formed into two parties of four each, operating in each of these two valleys.

In its capacity as the authority controlling the Rotorua Acclimatization District, the Department undertook operations in the Lake Waikaremoana area. A small party operated in this area for two and a half months; the damage and spread was checked and the deer brought under control. Arrangements were made for future observation to be maintained and the work continued as found necessary. A system of issuing special authorities to accredited persons to destroy deer, wild pigs, and wild cattle has been followed; and, as a result, 280 deer, twenty-one wild pigs, and two wild cattle have been destroyed. Quite a number of permits have not yet expired, and the results from these will doubtless considerably increase these numbers.

The total results of the year's operations were: 11,300 deer killed; 277 goats killed; 6,246 deer-skins recovered. While, in addition, the tail bonus to private individuals in the South Island was paid in respect of 17,958 deer killed.

The success attained is very largely attributable to the zeal and energy of the men employed: all were of excellent stamina, enthusiasm, and prowess, and not one dismissal was necessary. The work throughout was of an extremely arduous nature.

In the Marlborough-Nelson to Hanmer movement some men who left the Blenheim-Murchison Road near Tophouse on the 7th November did not again see civilization until they came into Hanmer on the 28th May.

Ample evidence of the tremendous destruction caused by deer was apparent during the course of operations in the Makarora Valley. The area comprises a comparatively small strip of grassland on the valley "floor," a broad belt of forest lying between the "floor" and the "timber-line" below the "snowtops," and a vast area of tussock-covered "tops" above the "timber-line." These "tops" provide abundant feed for deer during the summer and autumn, but during the winter are completely covered with snow, when the deer live entirely in the bush and, immediately the spring feed shows up, on the flats. The result of the whole stock of deer from this great area being concentrated in the bush for some months is that every green thing within reach is eaten and the ground is trampled like a stock-yard.

The inroads on our pasture lands, too, have been very real; that genuine relief has been afforded by the deer-killing operations of the Department is fully substantiated by advices received from pastoralists in the districts worked over. Runholders have not only sought the Department's assistance, but have whole-heartedly co-operated with the Department to the utmost of their ability. Many expressions of their appreciation and of their gratification at the results achieved have been received.

As mentioned in previous reports, the Department was much concerned as to the expenditure involved in the methods adopted for deer-destruction from which no direct return was being received. It was realized that the most satisfactory solution would be the commercialization of the work of destruction; hence the decision to save skins in all possible cases, so as to explore the possibility of markets for this commodity. Without detailing all the efforts made to find avenues for sale overseas, it is sufficient now to say that markets have been found at a price which should make deer-destruction attractive and remunerative as an avenue of employment. The tail bonus (first 2s., and later 1s. 6d.) payments have, therefore, been discontinued and a bonus for skins on basis of weight substituted. Should the present market demand be maintained, it is hoped that with the operation of organized parties in the rougher and inaccessible breeding-areas, and that of private individuals and parties elsewhere, the deer menace to forest and pasture can soon be regarded as under effective control.

GOATS.

Under a special arrangement with the runholders, during deer-destruction operations in Marlborough, a certain number of goats were killed in areas infested with these animals with a view of investigating the best methods of dealing with them and of finding a market for the skins as in the case of deer.

PERSONAL.

As indicated in the last report of the Department, Mr. G. P. Newton retired from the office of Under-Secretary on the 30th June, 1931. The vacancy thus caused was filled by the appointment of Mr. P. J. Kelleher, who in turn retired on the 29th April, 1932. Mr. Kelleher was associated with the Internal Affairs Department for twenty years, during which period he ably filled the positions of Clerk in Charge Advertising Office, Chief Clerk, Inspector of Totalizators, Assistant Under-Secretary, and Under-Secretary.

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