

den nooks, present ever-changing pictures. Caerhowel Arm, piercing almost to the centre of the island, is wonderfully beautiful. At first a couple of miles or less in width, the hills on either side rising steeply over 1000 feet, and covered with a close forest of varied greens, it gradually narrows as its head is approached, the mountains increasing in height. Then the calm waters of the Rakiahua River are gained, which, winding through the forest, unfold new beauties at each bend, the banks adorned with tall shrubs of many kinds, their leaves glittering in the sunshine, while forest, shrubbery, and the neighbouring mountains are perfectly mirrored in the dark waters unruffled save where the dainty little teal swims quite fearless of the intruder.

It has been shown that the future of Stewart Island does not depend upon its agricultural capabilities, but upon its value as a pleasure resort, this value arising, indeed, from the general uselessness of the plant-covering as food for stock and the slight value of much of the forest for timber purposes. It has also been shown what a splendid asset to Stewart Island and to the Dominion is the possession of a primeval plant-covering, with its accompanying bird-life, and how this virgin state of the island increases infinitely its value as an attraction to visitors.

The lesson to be learnt therefrom, and which is illustrated by almost every page of this report, is that the plant-covering should, as far as possible, be kept intact; that, in fact, the forest as it is and the other plant-associations as they are, are far more valuable from the monetary point of view to the Dominion than if they were destroyed and turned into farms, the value of which would be at best very problematical. This fact the Government has recognised by the gazetting of those parts of the island shown on the map as, on the one hand, scenic reserves, and, on the other, reserves for preservation of fauna and flora.

It now remains to see that these reserves are kept sacred. No bird should be destroyed within their precincts, no trees should be felled, and fires should be carefully guarded against. On the preserving of these reserves inviolate the prosperity of Stewart Island depends. Certain sanctuaries for plants and animals have now been in existence for several years in New Zealand, but in order to protect them no one is allowed to visit them. This gazetting of the large areas in Stewart Island has

virtually created another sanctuary, but here is the difference: it is one which can be visited, and where, for all time, if it is religiously guarded, our own people, and visitors from all parts of the world, will be able to see the wonderful plant-life of New Zealand and her unique birds exactly as Nature planted the one and provided for the other.

Stewart Island is fortunate in not possessing so many species of naturalised foreign animals as are in New Zealand generally. The hare, rabbit, ferret, stoat, and weasel are absent. On the other hand, the so-called Australian "opossum" was introduced a few years ago. It is already doing some damage in gardens, and also to the forest plants, especially to the tree-ferns. I am told. Virginia deer have been liberated in the neighbourhood of Port Pegasus, and red-deer in the Freshwater Valley. Animals, such as the above, which feed on herbaceous plants or scrubs, must bring about changes in the vegetation, altering its character, and with that the scenery, and undoing exactly what the setting-aside of so much of the island as a plant and animal sanctuary is designed to effect. Nor, in this case, can the value of these animals for sport be held as a plea, since the trivial amount of open ground the dense character of the sub-alpine scrub, and the close forest growth renders Stewart Island quite unsuitable as a hunting ground.

The presence of rats and cats and their effect on the bird-life has already been referred to. The common introduced European birds are plentiful, but they are chiefly in the neighbourhood of settlements and in the more open country, and have not interfered to any extent as yet with the indigenous avifauna.

All that is now required to achieve the object of this sanctuary is three or four keepers of the right stamp, equipped with a fast oil-launch.

Surely the preservation of this magnificent asset is worth such a small expenditure. In fact it could be quickly made self supporting.

#### VALUE OF BIRDS.

United States Bulletin No. 34 says:—"The more the food habits of birds are studied the more evident is the fact that with a normal distribution of species and fair supply of natural food, the damage to agricultural products by birds is small, compared with the benefit.