

proved. . . . The careful preservation of this valuable bird cannot be too strongly urged upon the whole rural community."

With regard to the Short Eared Owl, the Board already mentioned states that during a great plague of mice in Gloucestershire these owls appeared in great numbers and materially assisted in destroying them. They also proved markedly useful during the last severe plague of voles in the South of Scotland.

The summing up is as follows: "It would be difficult to condemn too severely the foolish and cruel action of those who allow or encourage the destruction of this useful and beautiful bird, and it was with much satisfaction that they were able to record that many land-owners and game-preservers had become convinced in late years that owls of *all sorts* are not only harmless to game, but most beneficial to agriculturists and had issued orders for their preservation.

The following extract refers to that beautiful little falcon, the Kestrel.

"The wholesale destruction of such birds as the Kestrel is frequently the main cause of abnormal and sudden attacks upon crops by animals and insects. In favourable conditions of climate and other circumstances, and in the absence of the checks provided by Nature against their undue increase, certain animals multiply exceedingly and do infinite harm, as was exemplified by the serious injury occasioned to grassland in parts of Scotland by voles in 1892. Insects also appear more frequently and in large numbers in these later days owing in some measure to the destruction of certain birds, their natural enemies."

One could go on to greater length, quoting bird after bird that has in the past been sadly and erroneously depleted in numbers because their true value had not been ascertained.

Nearer home, the salvation of Lord Howe Island brought about by owls comes to mind.

I have endeavoured to show that in Britain the rat has many natural enemies. Now, I am not advocating the release of any of these birds in New Zealand. The point I want to impress is that the rat is not a native of Britain any more than it is of this country! Both the rats mentioned are of Asiatic origin and first appeared in the British Isles about the 13th century. Yet some of the British native birds soon commenced to prey upon them! What of our own owl, the Morepork? He has already commenced a crusade against the rat, but what praise, thanks, or encouragement does he receive? What of the Woodhens who patrol our forest floors? (and that opossum trappers destroy). What of the wholesale slaughter of the Harrier? But perhaps that is partly why Acclimatisation Societies find so many rats to cope with and game birds decreasing.