

In other directions affecting the immediate future of the forest and its life much has been said and written about the destruction caused by deer, but a greater curse to the bush, because more insidious, is the opossum. It is worse than the deer because it cannot be destroyed by attempting to shoot it out, and because its work is not obvious to casual travellers and sportsmen. Old bushmen and rangers know something of the havoc which the opossum makes among the native birds. It lives on exactly the berries and the young leaves that the birds eat, and it destroys nestlings and eggs and in one way and another fatally disturbs the ancient balance of Nature in the bush. But a strong effort is being put forth to make this pest a permanent feature of our forest life. The acclimatisation societies, which have been such a curse to the country, are backed by the Government and commercial interests in their efforts to protect the opossum for the sake of revenue. A miserable excuse for the ruin of the pristine forest life.

"Stock more forests" is the cry. If these societies have their way, every tract of bush in the two islands will literally be infested with these foreign animals, as great a pest to the bush as the rabbit has been to the pastoral country. Tens

of thousands of skins are taken every season, and the bush is polluted with the remains. In the Wellington district alone it is reported that fifty thousand opossums were trapped during the past winter. The opossum indeed seems to be regarded as a commercially sacred creature, only to be taken in one way. A Wellington magistrate fined a man £10 the other day for poisoning opossums. Those who realise what the opossum hordes mean to the indigenous bush life of the country would be glad to see the whole tribe poisoned and the forest cleansed of its foes. The only bright spot in this sorry condition is the fact that many rats are reported to have been caught in the opossum traps.



THE TREE LUCERNE IS A GREAT ATTRACTION FOR NECTAR-EATING BIRDS.