

natural habitat. Food and cover, especially winter food, will decide the carrying capacity of the habitat, which may be likened to a pastoral run in that it will carry what it can winter, except that some wild creatures will migrate to other feeding grounds if available. New Zealand as a whole, will, however, carry only that wild life which it can winter, and thus it has always been. This carrying capacity can only be varied by adding to or destroying the natural food supply or augmenting it artificially.

When, however, the term "Vermin" is applied to unnatural or exotic enemies to wild life, the argument is quite different, and we need not go beyond New Zealand for many notable examples of inevitable results, as witness the deer, goats, etc., as unnatural enemies of our plant life. Stoats, weasels, rats, cats, etc., are also unnatural to our native bird life, which had prospered for ages upon ages in association with its natural enemies. They were then suddenly attacked by these strange enemies which had new and different methods of securing their prey. Add to this the effect of imported disease, with the destruction of the natural habitat; then it can be seen that the calamities were indeed overwhelming. Take for instance the introduction of the Little or German owl. The

fantail had long been accustomed to prey upon flying insects right up to dusk, and the attack was then taken up by bats until total darkness. Then the rats came out to prey upon eggs, nestlings, etc., and to be preyed upon themselves by the morepork. The Little owl, however, takes the fantail in daylight, a form of attack which the fantail or its ancestors had never previously experienced. The purposely introduced Little Owl thus played sad havoc with one of man's most useful allies. But then we must not forget that Man is his own natural enemy.

*Photo courtesy Edgar F. Stead*



*The Shag and the Harrier Hawk, two much-condemned birds of prey. Their food habits, however, have never been systematically examined.*

*Photo courtesy Bernard Sladden*

