

BIRD FORTRESSES.

BARBED WIRE AND BLASTED TRACKS.

BIRD-PROTECTION work in New Zealand must use all weapons at its disposal—propaganda, persuasion, fines, barbed wire and explosives. The last-mentioned sounds fantastic, yet it is one of the weapons of the defensive war which bird-protectionists must wage.

Propaganda we have always with us. Educational progress among the people is sufficiently evident. The cause of vandalism is not recruiting from the young population as many graduates as used to be recruited. And even confirmed old vandals are moving a little nearer to the light.

In some cases education is slower among the learned than among the ignorant. The intelligentsia is still prone to demand its museum pound of flesh. If this merely meant a pound of flesh for a few local museums, the collecting demand on birds and on their nests and eggs would be measurable; but the collecting demand seems to cover an exchange system between the world's museums. In other words, preserved plants, birds, dried animals and ethnological specimens are the currency of museums which are notoriously lacking in cash. Besides that there is ordinary commercial collecting. This is not a peasant industry, as in some countries in Europe. It is an industry carried on chiefly by the most cultured class—for it is unlikely that the gentlemen concerned would admit any lower status.

Irresponsibles who go out to shoot something are in another class, and among them sharp fines have some educational value.

Bird-protection by exclusion of trespassers is a policy that has obvious limits. It is not practicable to fence off large areas, and there are limits to the restricting of personal liberty of movement. Bird-protection cannot be oppressive of large public rights, but it has no punch in it if it dare not defend particular localities, where the advantage of seclusion for wild life is pre-eminent, and where the curtailment of people's liberty to enter is comparatively negligible.

Within this definition comes the attempt to exclude unauthorised persons from entry to the places on Otago Peninsula where penguins breed and where albatrosses are trying to breed.

"The bay in which the last surviving colony of penguins on the Otago Peninsula is situated" is privately owned. The Otago Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand has informed the Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand that the owner, Mr. D. McG. Reid, is willing to dedicate the bay as a reserve. The bay "consists of a ring of cliffs protecting about five acres of sandhill and talus. The cliffs can be descended at one point, and one of the headlands can be passed at low water. The committee has expended £6 in making the cliff track impassable by blasting, and intends to block access round the headland by a fence about 15ft. in length, consisting of three vertical railway irons set in concrete and linked with pig wire. The maximum cost of making the penguin colony secure is estimated at £25, and financial help for the Society will not be amiss."

It seems that the bay where these penguins breed is the bay where a vandal was caught not very long ago and fined £50.

In the same district the energetic Dunedin people are endeavouring to protect a colony of about six hundred white-fronted shags which inhabit a cliff-face on the open sea. Some time ago the south end of the colony was cleared by rifle fire from a neighbouring point.

Shag-killers rarely distinguish between species. In any case, the evidence against the trout-eating species is quite inconclusive. How many men are there in New Zealand who are competent to make a stomach analysis, and to identify partly digested contents?

A task worthy of scientific investigation, with the backing of the Department of Internal Affairs, would be reliable stomach analyses and a fair statement of the guilt or innocence of shags and hawks, having regard to their war not only on trout but on trout enemies (such as eels), and not only on game birds but on their deadly enemies, rats and mice.

This, so far as trout fishing and game shooting are concerned, would be the businesslike method. As it is, license holders' money is being spent by guesswork, and in some cases absurdly, such as in the paying of bounties on species of shags which do not frequent rivers.