

A DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY.

REVENUE VERSUS NATIVE DUCKS.

THE Minister of Internal Affairs, the Hon. W. E. Parry, has repeatedly warned Acclimatisation Societies as to the necessity of a periodical closed season for grey duck and all native ducks. Some years ago duck shooting was not nearly so popular as it is at present, simply because it is usually a cold wet job and upland game birds, such as pheasants, Californian quail, etc., were plentiful.

Recent years have seen a rapid lessening of all upland game birds and hares and an increasing number of hunters. The result is that now nearly all shooting is concentrated on the unfortunate duck with disastrous effect on the capital stock.

Added to the ever-increasing proportionate slaughter are such factors as improved guns and ammunition and the reprehensible practice of baiting the birds before the beginning of the season, in order that the birds will confidently come within easy range of the guns on the opening day.

The oft-heard objection to close seasons is the loss of revenue from licenses by Acclimatisation Societies. The final result of the present practice will be, of course, no ducks, no revenue and no Acclimatisation Societies, unless these bodies are able to carry on solely with the revenue from fishing licenses. This source of revenue is scarcely likely to maintain its present volume when the effect of forest destruction becomes more impressed on rivers and streams.

Hunters are already down to shooting such non-game birds as pukeko, the shooting of which is certainly not sport, in any sense of the word. The public are told that the killing of these birds is for the farmer's protection, as though they were not well able to look after their own interests. A permit to destroy any birds, which any farmer considers are doing him more harm than good, is not likely to be refused. The desire to furnish something to kill for the mere killer and thus secure additional revenue is the main incentive when application is made to the Minister to include such clumsy-flying birds in his seasonal warrant. The man who is out for sport would not bother about them, and probably has a regard for such docile and handsome birds.

The Department of Internal Affairs has to shoulder the responsibility in such matters as the preservation of waterfowl. The Minister has the power and, in this case, the knowledge of the precarious position of native ducks and must know that delay is dangerous, because it is a well-known fact that when the numbers of a species are reduced to almost vanishing point, re-establishment of the species is generally an impossibility, and extermination follows.

There are, however, other methods of saving the waterfowl besides periodical closed seasons. One is to sub-divide each Acclimatisation Society's district into areas like the pattern of a chess-board, and alternately open and close adjoining areas each week. This scheme would prevent all waters being manned with guns at the same time, as they have been on the opening day of the waterfowl shooting season, but it might make ranging difficult.

The surest way of saving the fast-diminishing native ducks is the setting up of a chain of efficiently managed sanctuaries throughout the land under the care and control of the Department, a scheme which we have already suggested in detail. The whole responsibility in the preservation of waterfowl rests with the Minister and his Department. It is sincerely hoped that they will not be lulled into any sort of a sense of false security by considering that there is plenty of time because ducks can be seen in considerable numbers in a few places. These are concentrations. There are innumerable places now where they used to be present in numbers but are absent to-day. The time is ripe for action now. Delay is indeed dangerous.