

A FRIENDLY CHAT ABOUT SHAGS

The Blunder of Declaring All Shags "Black"

An Appeal to Yachtsmen, Launchmen, and Others

This statement, issued by the Forest and Bird Protection Society, should be read carefully, especially by people who have been misled by ignorant allegations about "shags" — as if all shags were of the same species.

There is great lack of knowledge among the public with regard to the habits and haunts of the various shags. Indeed, heads of the Department, which administers wild life matters, and Acclimatisation Societies, which are expected to care for wild life in the field, loosely use the word "shag" instead of naming the particular species which they accuse of poaching trout. Consequently there is a widespread impression that all species of shags are enemies to trout, with the result that much unnecessary slaughter of innocent species is taking place, and license-holders' money is being paid out in the form of bounty on species which do not attack river fish.

The Minister of Internal Affairs, the Hon. W. E. Parry, in his endeavours to act in a sportsmanlike manner, in a letter to the Forest and Bird Protection Society, states:—

"I have certainly no desire to see destroyed any species of shag which does not create a problem in our trout fisheries, and I shall be only too pleased to help in allotting the blame correctly to black shags as you suggest."

THE BLACK SHAG frequents rivers, and does take trout, but many observers are of the opinion that it is quite possible that this species does more good than harm, because its natural food is eels and other native fish. In some districts it lives almost wholly on eels, which are enemies of trout. No scientific research has been made with reference to this species, therefore nobody knows the facts.

Inhabiting Stewart Island and the east and west coasts of Otago are two absolutely protected species of shag, known as the Stewart Island Shag and the Bronze Shag. The former

has a well developed crest in the breeding season, is black above and white below, with white areas on back and wings. The Bronze Shag also has a crested head, but its general plumage is black. It freely mixes and inter-breeds with the Stewart Island Shag. As there are no trout in Stewart Island streams the shooting of any species of shags should be entirely prohibited there.

Most species of shags are handsome birds and add much charm to many scenes. Anglers should bear in mind that there are more people interested in the preservation of New Zealand's native birds than there are trout fishermen, and that in their endeavours to protect their sport care should be taken not to incite people to kill those species which are doing their sport no harm whatever. The innocent shags include some species which it is the duty of Acclimatisation Societies to protect under their deed of trust, The Animals Protection and Game Act, 1921-2.

The Forest and Bird Protection Society feels sure that all the better-thinking sportsmen will help to put a stop to an unwarrantable persecution of innocents, especially those species which are protected by law.

Any person who takes or kills any such bird or sells or has in his possession any protected birds or their nests, eggs or feathers is liable to a fine of £25 for each offence. Moreover all guns, launches, yachts, motor cars, etc., used or intended to be used contrary to the provision of the Act are liable to seizure and confiscation.