

WILD LIFE MANAGEMENT

URGENT NEED OF REFORM

SUGGESTIONS for more democratic methods in the management of wild-life matters have been put forth during recent months by the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Hon. W. E. Parry. These proposals have been resented by those Societies which have in the past been entrusted with the administration of wild-life affairs in the field. Exactly why this should be is not quite clear, except that it may mean the loss of power to those sections which collect revenue from fishing and shooting enthusiasts.

The Minister's idea appears to be to recognise that the problems connected with the steady decline of most desirable wild life are not to be solved by sectional views, and that the whole question is so complex that it is quite beyond the ability of any layman, no matter how enthusiastic, to formulate a satisfactory policy.

A Biological Committee, to make research into the cause of the steady decline of the sportsmen's and anglers' needs, native birds, and so on, is therefore mentioned as being part of the new programme. This does not mean, of course, that a body of scientists will be set up to manage wild-life matters, but rather that the results of their research work will be submitted for consideration by the management. Valuable as scientific research is it would as a rule be only courting disaster to allow theoretical science to dominate the practical side.

Part of the immediate programme for the benefit of hunters is the limiting of the coming season to two weeks, and having a close season in the following year. This sorely-needed respite for game birds is certainly to be commended. It is a reminder that the methods of the past have signally failed and that reform is long overdue. In Canada and the United States of America, where sportsmen have been faced with a similar decline in waterfowl, the main effort in the attempt to arrest the decrease has been put into the creation of many properly managed sanctuaries, the re-establishment of previously de-watered areas, and other measures. Presumably, similar action will be taken in New Zealand during the respite which is now being granted to waterfowl.

In the case of fish and game birds it is easy enough to put the blame on hawks, shags, etc., and then spend the revenue from licenses in killing the supposed enemies. The unconsidered destruction of indigenous predators indicates a non-biological mind and is not the solution of the problem. For instance, a recent observer reported that he had carefully watched hen pheasants with their young in his district, and that the chicks were taken extremely long journeys in their daily hunts for food, so much so that the young appeared to become almost exhausted. Why was this so? Simply because the necessary grubs, etc., which constituted the chicks' food were difficult to find. This again indicates soil impoverishment as compared with those days when pheasants and other game birds abounded. Good soil, with a heavy humus content, would produce ample food, easily obtained.

The same cause may be found to be connected with declines in the anglers' requirements. Thus, as always, one is led back to the evils following the destruction of the indigenous forest on the highlands.

Careful research in the field is the only method, however, which will lead to the discovery of the most pressing need upon which wild life revenue should be expended.

Surely, then, every sportsman, every fisherman, every nature lover of our native land should appreciate the Minister's efforts to improve on the past methods which have failed even in those avenues which particularly concerned the section entrusted with field administration. We should all endeavour to assist the effort which is designed to make amends for past blunders and muddles. If this necessary action had been taken years ago, there would be no need now to impose restrictions on shooting seasons. The game birds would have been regarded as capital, yielding an annual interest for sportsmen. Under the old bad scheme of things the capital has been threatened with extinction.