

Where large blocks of Crown and Native lands exist the mode of dealing with them has been to allow the neighbouring owners a certain sum by tender for keeping the pest under, the work to be done to the satisfaction of the local Inspector.

With reference to other blocks, the only available course open at present is to at once expend the necessary amount required for the purpose under the supervision of the Inspector. Were this plan not adopted a season for poisoning would be lost, and thus render in a great measure futile the endeavours of those landowners who are carrying on the work of extermination. In connection with this work sums of money have been authorized in various districts, and the Inspectors are instructed to proceed with the work as rapidly as possible.

I am of opinion that where unoccupied lands, available for depasturing purposes, but infested with rabbits, exist, and for which land occupiers can be obtained, the Government should where possible divest itself, *pro tem.*, of the ownership of such lands by letting them for grazing purposes for such term as would indemnify those taking them up for destroying the rabbits.

#### *Poison.*

To further assist the Inspectors in dealing with reserves, as well as to place the means of destruction within reach of those not readily able to obtain a supply, depôts for phosphorus have been established in each district, where poison can be obtained at a moderate cost. A machine for phosphorizing grain on the latest improved principle has been obtained from the Victorian Government, and others will be made on the same pattern, and each Rabbit Inspector furnished with one, and, if found as beneficial as reported, local manufacturers can supply the public.

Experiments on a small scale have also been instituted with other poisons in Otago, but sufficient time has not yet elapsed to obtain definite results. I may further add that I have this day received from Dunedin a description of an exterminator on a new principle: if it is only half as good as anticipated by the inventor it will certainly make the destruction of rabbits where burrows exist an easy task; it appears to have many advantages in its favour, and I think it is worthy of a fair trial.

#### *Natural Enemies.*

It having been generally admitted that the introduction of the natural enemy of the rabbit is the only thorough solution of the pest, endeavours have been made in that direction. Several shipments of ferrets have been procured from Melbourne, and small lots are expected regularly by sailing vessels from Great Britain.

It is proposed to establish breeding depôts in both Islands for the distribution of the animals on Crown lands. I am of opinion that the best results could be obtained by engaging the assistance where possible of the Acclimatization Societies to this end, every convenience to manage the affair properly being at their disposal.

Other enemies, such as the stoat and weasel may be introduced, if found practicable.

#### *Dogs and Traps.*

Using packs of dogs for the destruction of the rabbit has in many instances been found a greater plague than the rabbit itself. In my opinion they often help to distribute them throughout the country. In some places in the South Island dogs used for hunting the rabbits have gone wild, doing great damage amongst stock, as well as destroying ferrets and other natural enemies of the rabbits.

Trapping is also extensively carried on, especially in the summer season, when poisoning is not so efficacious. Although a great number of rabbits are destroyed by this process, it is open to objection, as many of the natural enemies of the rabbits are destroyed as well.

Reviewing the whole question it can be fairly reasoned that if, as admitted, under the late Rabbit Trusts a certain amount of success was obtained with what could only have been, at best, disunited action, with the waste lands of the Crown unprovided for, surely a greater success must be the result of more united efforts under the present organization, even if that is not as perfect as it might be. Good work is undoubtedly being done, but as the work proceeds many difficulties wholly unforeseen crop up. Some time must elapse before all can be thoroughly grappled with and provided for.

Circumstances requiring attention are continually arising, and information lately obtained tends to show that the pest is spreading still further. Petitions for, and counter-petitions against, declaring certain counties rabbit districts in South Canterbury have been received, and special inquiries are now being instituted to ascertain the true facts of the case. From the manner in which the pest is distributed more or less throughout the whole colony, it becomes a question whether it would not be wise to declare any county in which rabbits may be found a rabbit district at once, and, by adopting this course, immediately deal with the evil, instead of allowing valuable time to elapse before definite steps are taken. Hitherto, when districts have been proclaimed rabbit districts, it has been adopted more as a last resource and compulsory measure, rather than the expediency of prevention.

With experience gained by practice, other and cheaper means for destroying the pest will be discovered; still, for some years the pest will, I am afraid, be an annual tax on the landowner.

Since the Act of 1881 came into force, experience in working it has shown that it is surrounded with conditions that makes it difficult as well as expensive to administer, and its machinery is too complicated: too much, yet too little is left to both Bench and Inspector; consequently a great deal of dissatisfaction prevails.

I would suggest an amendment to the present Act, and will submit suggestions indicating proposed alterations.

It is only when all portions of the community realize that this pest affects one and all of them that unanimity of action can be expected. So long as under present conditions a certain portion of the community make a profit and living out of what is injuring the colony at large, so long will it be to their interest to farm the plague for their special benefit; yet the present steps taken must modify the evil to a great extent.

I have, &c.,

BENJ. P. BAYLY,

Superintending Inspector.

The Hon. Colonial Secretary, Wellington.