

arrived in July last per "Doric," out of 74 weasels and 27 stoats shipped 67 weasels and 23 stoats were landed. The weasels were released on a peninsula of about 8,000 acres, on Wanaka Lake. I visited the place about three months ago, and the effects of their presence were unmistakable: although the ground adjacent to where they were liberated had not been poisoned or otherwise dealt with for over twelve months, rabbits were scarce and deserted burrows plentiful. The stoats which were turned out on the east side of Hawea Lake, have been seen on several occasions, are said to be doing good work, rabbits evidently killed by them having been repeatedly found. In January last another shipment arrived per "Ionic," consisting of 116 weasels and 32 stoats, out of 128 weasels and 33 stoats shipped. To test the market value of these animals, as well as to ascertain whether their introduction was appreciated, it was determined to offer one-half of the shipment for sale by auction in equal proportions at Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin. This was done, with the result that the demand was far in excess of the supply, and the prices realized were very satisfactory. The remainder not sold—43 weasels and 14 stoats—were liberated on Crown lands, at the following places: 28 weasels and 6 stoats at Lake Wakatipu, 15 weasels at Waiau, in Wallace County, and 8 stoats at Mesopotamia, Ashburton County. Some weasels were also intended for the latter place; but, as immediate means of transit were not procurable without running the risk of losing a number, I was obliged to take them on to Otago, there sell a portion, and liberate the remainder. 20 weasels and 6 stoats were sold at Wellington, 18 weasels and 6 stoats at Christchurch, and 35 weasels and 6 stoats at Dunedin. I subsequently visited the ground where the animals were released at Lake Wakatipu, and saw weasels in pursuit of rabbits. As stoats and weasels can now be successfully introduced, these and other natural enemies must be solely depended on for dealing with the far interior. It may be interesting to know that immediately the success of the above importation was seen a syndicate of runholders was at once formed for the purpose of introducing another shipment as a private undertaking, and the same man (Allbones) who had charge of previous shipments engaged to bring out three hundred animals, or as many as space could be provided for in one vessel. Government has since employed another agent for a similar purpose, and, should this shipment prove successful, I purpose liberating the whole consignment at the head of Wanaka Lake, or as near to Haast Saddle as possible.

Ferrets are generally reported to be doing good work, and are evidently doing well in parts of the colony where my impression was that the climate would be too severe in winter for their existence. The number bred privately this year far exceeds that of last, and their utility is, as a rule, being recognized, but not to the extent it should be. Great numbers of them are annually destroyed where trapping and dogging is carried on. Very few of those who are trying ferrets as an expedient either clear their ground sufficiently of rabbits or turn their ferrets out in sufficient numbers on any one block so as to give the ferret a fair chance against the number of rabbits. A few turned out here and there, where rabbits are numerous and constant work required, is of little service. A procedure which manifestly must militate against the fair increase of or benefit derived from turning out these animals is, I regret to say, caused in some instances through property-holders, who should know better, indiscriminately purchasing, at a low price, mixed lots of ferrets, without ascertaining where from or how obtained. This offers a premium for rabbiters to trap and sell at a figure which cannot possibly pay the breeder. There have been 534 ferrets purchased this year and liberated on various reserves and Crown lands in Wallace, Southland, Clutha, and Lake Counties; 177, bred at the Government dépôt at Waimata, were released on Canterbury boundary at head of Wanaka Lake; 45 from the dépôt were turned out on Crown lands near the Napier and Wellington boundary, besides 30 that were purchased and turned out on the Awhea and Haurangi Blocks, in the Wairarapa. The distribution of ferrets on terms has in no instance been found a success, those taking them usually from want of experience lose them by disease, or are not successful as breeders. I have abandoned the idea of any further attempts in this direction, and I find the purchase of healthy young ferrets, at the Government price of 10s. per head, by far the cheapest and most satisfactory method. The dépôt at Waimata has only been moderately successful; at the same time I deem it necessary to continue this establishment, so that ferrets may be turned out as rabbits appear near the Napier-Wellington boundary fence.

No improvement on the phosphorized-grain method has been discovered, nor have any new methods been reported during the year. The block system of poisoning in winter is now generally recognized, and adopted everywhere with satisfactory results, and is admitted to be absolutely necessary where success is desired.

In Canterbury the reduction of rabbits on what few stations they were known to exist has proved satisfactory. Here they have been taken in time, and, by not allowing them to increase in numbers beyond control, they can and are being kept well under. Should a sudden increase of the pest take place here, I do not expect to see it arise from rabbits bred within the district, but look upon an influx from the back country as the danger to be dreaded; and every precaution is necessary to meet the emergency, should it arise. So far as possible, I have liberated stoats, weasels, and ferrets near to the margin of the pest; but far more are required to make this part safe from encroachment. It is proposed during winter to poison all accessible portions of waste lands in this country; and it is on areas of this description, which, under ordinary circumstances, can, even in summer, only be partially dealt with, that a bait as attractive at that season as phosphorized grain is in winter would be invaluable, even if more expensive in its adoption.

Nothing further has been reported of the disease in rabbits resembling tuberculosis to which I referred in last year's report; nor do I think the matter to be of sufficient importance to be worth further investigation. With a view to dealing with local matters with greater celerity, departmental changes have been made by which the Chief Inspector of each district now exercises the same authority and control over rabbit matters that he has hitherto exercised under Stock Acts only; and it is expected this will act beneficially, inasmuch as district matters will now be under closer supervision, and immediate requirements attended to with greater facility than has hitherto been practicable. In conclusion, I may remark that, having fully dealt with the whole question