

1885.

NEW ZEALAND.

THE RABBIT NUISANCE

(ANNUAL REPORT ON, BY THE SUPERINTENDING INSPECTOR).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

Mr. B. P. BAYLY to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

Colonial Secretary's Office (Stock Branch), Wellington, 1st June, 1885.

I have the honour to furnish my annual report upon the rabbit nuisance and result of operations for the year 1884-85.

As the Rabbit Nuisance Act of 1882, which has hitherto been found to work satisfactorily, will expire on the 30th September next, it will be incumbent during the coming session that the Act be either extended over a further period or other measures adopted in lieu of it. I respectfully submit that the present Act be adopted in its entirety for whatever period Parliament may deem advisable.

With the exception of Lake District, where want of unanimity on the part of settlers, together with a too-lenient administration of the Act by the Inspector in charge, offers an unfavourable contrast with work done elsewhere, I find that the operations of the past year have been generally satisfactory, and a further diminution of the pest apparent, but not so marked as during the previous year. I account for this by the fact that our means of destruction are at present taxed comparatively to their utmost limit, and see no hope of permanent relief until the natural enemy has sufficiently increased to act as a decided check on the pest's increase during the summer months.

As the greatest difficulty to be surmounted lies in the fact that the system of rabbit-destruction by poison cannot be confined to that means throughout the year, so that the good derived during winter will not be neutralized by the increase in numbers during summer; and I am strongly of opinion that great encouragement should be offered for the purpose of discovering a poison that will be effectual during the summer season.

I have again this year to call attention to the amounts paid annually by the department for clearing reserves of all descriptions which otherwise would become mere rabbit-warrens, and again urge the necessity of letting all or any that may be fit for grazing purposes, but which are neglected by their ostensible owners. If this were adopted, one large item in the annual expenditure would be avoided. My suggestions in this direction were given fully in last year's report. I also alluded to the danger that might be apprehended from the rough and inaccessible country between Lakes Wakatipu and Wanaka; and I regret to say that my anticipations have been verified. In February last I visited the west side of Lake Wanaka, and travelled from thence nearly to the Haast Saddle, on the Makarora River, and saw either rabbits or traces of them throughout the whole distance. Near the lake itself they are coming in rapidly on ground where less than two years ago no rabbits existed, and are to be met with in patches for a distance of fully fifteen miles north of the lake. Beyond this again only an occasional rabbit or traces are as yet to be seen; and, although undoubtedly they may be vastly reduced in numbers on all occupied ground during poisoning season, yet this country will each season be restocked from the back wastes. There is a further element of danger here which should not be overlooked; the pest is established on the main range of mountains forming the western watershed, extending throughout the South Island, and sooner or later will work along this route into the back of Canterbury country. It is here that every effort should be made to check their increase by turning out as many of the natural enemy as can be obtained, and with as little delay as possible. Most of the area referred to is quite inaccessible to man, yet affords sufficient scope for the rabbits to stock the neighbouring country.

During the past twelve months two shipments of stoats and weasels have been received by the Government, and all doubt as to the possibility of introducing these animals removed, the success attending these shipments having exceeded all expectations. By the first shipment, that