

1275. How was the spread of rabbits accomplished in your district?—In a most amazing manner. They went over the country like a wave.

1276. How many years ago?—It was about 1871 they began to show themselves away from where they had been known to exist in large numbers. This was on the coast; and in 1880 and 1881 I think we were at no period of our history so much infested with rabbits.

1277. Can you indicate what distance of country they have traversed in that time—say, the mileage northwards, for instance?—They have extended from the western shores of Southland right up to the Lake country and Central Otago—practically two hundred miles.

1278. The whole County of Southland, of which you have charge, has now rabbits over it to a greater or less degree?—Yes.

1279. In your opinion, is it the fact that you have no difficulty in carrying out the Act due to the settlers recognizing that it is to their interests to keep the rabbits down?—Entirely that. Repressive legislation will not do it altogether.

1280. And it is a well-established fact in Southland that the owners feel that if they do not keep the rabbits down the latter will drive them out?—Precisely.

1281. Perhaps you can give some idea of the injury done to pastoral properties by the pest?—There were a great many runs abandoned in 1880 and 1881 entirely owing to that; and now we have only one small run, which was never of much account, which is unoccupied leasehold at the present time.

1282. Is it within your knowledge whether these lands were relet at a higher or lower value?—Very much higher.

1283. Can you explain how that came about?—I attribute it to the fact that the landholders saw their way to deal effectually with the rabbit nuisance, because the efficacy of phosphorus was by this time established.

1284. Are their anticipations being fulfilled?—Very much where they have worked vigorously. It is a question of expenditure after all. It is not to be overcome without expenditure.

1285. And it will not be done in a short time?—No; it will take some years, even with the application of capital.

1286. Have you come to any conclusion as to the time it is likely to take?—No; I have not taken it into consideration.

1287. It is generally expected that the value of skins in winter recoups the owner for the expense of taking them?—They have done so hitherto, but they would not recoup him for winter and summer work if he employs much labour during the summer time.

1288. Is it not a fact that this annually-recurring expenditure in winter is caused through insufficient measures not being taken in summer?—Entirely so. It is great folly to spend a large amount of money in winter time, and allow its effect to be nullified in summer. A large company down south spent £4,000 over and above all the skins returned, in poisoning their estate. In consequence of keeping up the expenditure in summer the manager informed me that their sheep clipped one and a half pounds more wool than for the previous six or seven years, and the condition of their stock was 2s. per head better.

1289. Would you recommend that a moderate bonus should be paid by the Government in summer for young rabbits as well as the skins of grown rabbits?—I think it would afford a certain amount of relief to Crown tenants in summer time, and give an incentive to summer killing; and, after all, the nesting-time is the most vital time to kill.

1290. Do you think that fencing would prevent the plague from spreading to districts that have hitherto been free?—I do not think it would, for this reason: You cannot erect a large line of fencing without crossing many rivers, roads, and ravines, and it would require careful surveillance to keep the rabbits from crossing. It would be an assistance, but would not be worth its cost as a barrier.

1291. Have you heard of rabbits jumping a 3ft. fence?—I have seen them do it when they have been chased by dogs.

1292. Seeing that this question is of such national importance, do you think that a reward should be offered by Government to scientists to introduce a disease to kill the rabbits?—I think it would be a very great boon if it was a disease not likely to communicate itself to anything else. I am not sanguine about that. Even with a disease there would be sufficient left alive to propagate the species.

1293. Do you think that natural enemies are capable of coping with the plague?—No; not for the next fifty years, of their own force. It would require them to be almost as plentiful as the rabbits. It is well to encourage them: they do their work when we do not see them.

1294. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] You know what amount of destruction a pair of golden eagles will do in a district?—Yes.

1295. Do you not think golden eagles would be effective in a high country, where there is difficulty in approaching it?—There is not the least doubt about it. I think they would be the most effectual that could be introduced; but that has never occurred to me before. I know they are very scarce, and there would be a difficulty in getting them in numbers.

1296. Would they be equally effective in destroying another pest in the high country, the kea?—Yes.

1297. The kea can only be dealt with effectually by some other bird that prefers living at high elevations. Do you know of any other bird that would be likely to cope with the kea?—No. He is a clumsy bird, and would be very easily dealt with by the golden eagle, if introduced. The common hawk here is not to be found in the same regions as the kea unless he is attracted there by dead rabbits or carrion.

1298. But the eagle would?—Yes.