

1888.  
NEW ZEALAND.

# THE RABBIT NUISANCE.

INTERIM REPORT BY PROFESSOR A. P. W. THOMAS ON THE DISEASES AFFECTING RABBITS IN THE WAIRARAPA DISTRICT.

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

Professor A. P. W. THOMAS to the Hon. the MINISTER of LANDS.

SIR,—

University College, Auckland, 16th May, 1888.

I have the honour to forward herewith a report of the inquiry into the parasitic diseases affecting rabbits in the Wairarapa District, which was undertaken at your request. As some of the experiments are still in progress, I have termed it an interim report, but with respect to very many points I trust that it will be found sufficiently exhaustive.

In accordance with your instructions I have already forwarded to Mr. Bell a copy of the report for the use of the Rabbit Commission in Sydney.

I should be obliged if, after the report has been considered, you could inform me whether it is deemed advisable to propagate the diseases elsewhere. The general method of propagation of the diseases will be sufficiently clear from the report, but if it be decided to employ any one or more of the diseases I would draw up such specific instructions as could be used by unskilled persons.

The fact that stock feeding on the same ground as the diseased rabbits have remained healthy is probably sufficient in itself to demonstrate their harmlessness to stock, and this is confirmed by other evidence. Still, as an additional precaution, it might be desirable to prove the point experimentally, and, in this case, I will carry out such experiments on receiving your instructions. If the diseases are not to be employed the expense will be unnecessary. I may state that, so far, travelling-expenses, cost of animals, and general laboratory expenditure have not exceeded a total of £35.

If the report, or any part of it, is to be printed a few illustrations of the parasites, &c., would be a desirable addition, and could be readily added.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Minister of Lands.

A. P. W. THOMAS.

## INTERIM REPORT ON THE DISEASES AFFECTING RABBITS IN THE WAIRARAPA DISTRICT.

I have the honour of submitting the following interim report of the result of the inquiry made at your request into the diseases prevalent amongst rabbits in the Wairarapa District, and the possibility of utilising them as a remedy for the rabbit-pest.

The subject will be considered under the following heads:—

- I. The causes which have led to the decrease of rabbits in the Wairarapa.
- II. Observations and experiments concerning the diseases of rabbits found in the Wairarapa.
- III. The applicability of the diseases as a remedy for the rabbit-pest.

### I.—THE CAUSES WHICH HAVE LED TO THE DECREASE OF RABBITS IN THE WAIRARAPA.

The rabbits in the Wairarapa District, and particularly on the plain, have unquestionably been greatly diminishing in numbers during the last few years. This diminution has been attributed to the following causes: (1.) Poisoning—chiefly with phosphorised grain—in the winter-time. (2.) Trapping, and the use of dogs. (3.) The liberation of the natural enemies, as cats, ferrets, and, more recently, stoats and weasels. (4.) Parasitic disease, viz., that caused by the bladder-worm.

Mr. Bayley, the Superintending Inspector of Stock, has expressed the opinion that some factor outside the ordinary means of destruction by poisoning and rabbiting, is at work, either the natural enemy or disease. Mr. Orbell, the Inspector of Sheep and Rabbits in the Wairarapa District, has formed a similar opinion on this point. With reference to the last-named cause—parasitic disease—I may state that there is considerable diversity of opinion amongst those who have had opportunity for observation as to how far it has really been operative in the destruction of rabbits.

I spent ten days in the Wairarapa District, most of the time in the north, near Masterton, but was two or three days at Mr. Coleman Phillip's estate, at the Dry River, in the South Wairarapa. During this time, information was gathered as to how far means of destruction were