

RESERVES, PARKS, SANCTUARIES FOR NATIVE FAUNA, ETC.

The following figures summarise the reserves made for public purposes during the year:—

	A.	R.	P.
Recreation	953	2	26
Primary and secondary education	7,483	3	28
School-sites	401	1	24
Forest reserves and plantations	4,640	3	33
Preservation of Native fauna and flora, historical and scenic purposes	1,584	3	34
For the use of aboriginal natives	7,012	0	7
Sanatorium, Rotorua	285	2	0
Agricultural and pastoral show-grounds	73	1	30
Miscellaneous	1,421	0	6
	23,856	3	28

The principal items in the above table are the forest reservation of 3,900 acres in the Rewa district, Wellington, and the large area reserved for aboriginal natives, the latter including lands set aside in the Marlborough District for landless Natives of the Middle Island.

In the Tongariro National Park a bridle road has been made, leading up by easy grades from near the picturesque Otukou Native village, close to Lake Roto-a-Ira, up to the Kete-tahi hot-springs on the side of Tongariro Mountain, which will enable visitors to ride to these springs, the great healing properties of which in certain cases are well known. Moreover, from Kete-tahi to the top of Tongariro, an easy climb over the lava of an hour's duration will take the visitor to the top of the mountain, and enable him to see the number of craters in that locality. The four red deer turned out at the foot of the mountains have been constantly seen, but it is not known whether they have increased or not. It is proposed during the coming season to erect a hut near the Kete-tahi Springs for the use of visitors, and probably extend the bridle road so that the ascent of the mountain may be facilitated. The National Park Board has so far never met. The area of the park, as vested in the Crown by Act, is 62,300 acres, but the Native title has not yet been extinguished over the whole.

The exchange of land authorised by "The Reserves Disposal and Exchange Act, 1895," under which the Public Trustee was to relinquish about 5,500 acres covering the Patua Ranges, ten miles south of New Plymouth, for Crown lands of an equal value elsewhere, has been so far accomplished that the necessary documents to complete the transaction are preparing. The land given in exchange by the Crown consisted of 4,871 acres in the Mangapapa Block, Waitotara Valley. The Patua Ranges will thus become a public park or domain for the inhabitants of New Zealand. It is to be hoped that every effort will be made to preserve the native forests on this picturesque range, and that all interference with the fauna and flora will be prevented.

The Little Barrier Island—or Hauturu—was handed over to the charge of the Auckland Institute in December, 1896, with a view to the preservation of the native flora and fauna. The Government subsidises the Institute to an amount of £200 a year, and has also provided a sum of £250 for a caretaker's house. The secretary to the Auckland Institute, Mr. T. F. Cheeseman, F.L.S., has been good enough to furnish a report on the proceedings of the Institute with respect to the island, which will be found in the Appendix. This report speaks hopefully of the eventual preservation of a considerable number of species of native birds no longer to be found on the mainland.

The other principal reserve for the preservation of the native fauna is Resolution and the adjacent islands in Dusky Sound. Extracts from a report by Mr. R. Henry, as furnished to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Dunedin, will be found in the Appendix, in which he gives, amongst other things, a good deal of information interesting to naturalists as to the habits, &c., of some of the rarer birds encountered in that part of the colony. The birds which have been introduced from time to time from the mainland on to the island appear to be doing well. Mr. Henry mentions a fact which, so far as is known, does not appear to have been noticed before, to the effect that part of Breaksea Sound was frozen over with a thin coating of ice during last winter.

An Act was passed last session, authorising the acquisition of Kapiti Island, in Cook Strait, to be put to the same use as Resolution and the Little Barrier Islands—namely, the preservation of the native fauna and flora; but, although the preliminary steps have been taken, the island is not yet Crown land.

"THE MINING DISTRICTS LAND OCCUPATION ACT, 1894."

Few transactions take place under this Act: the selections last year amounted to 1,284 acres, in 23 sections, principally in Otago. The total area held under this system on the 31st March last was 6,860 acres, in 136 holdings. The lands are situated within the mining districts, and are occupied by miners, who are able to put in part of their time at cultivating. Under this heading may be included the agricultural leases within goldfields. The total number held on the 31st March being 26, comprising 1,233 acres.

SETTLEMENT CONDITIONS.

The inspection of properties held under conditions of improvement and residence is a work that increases from year to year, which is, of course, due to the retention by the Crown of the freehold, the lands being let subject to conditions of residence and improvement, this being the prevailing feature of the present Acts dealing with lands. On summarising the appended reports of the Commissioners, it will be seen that in most of the selections compliance with the conditions of lease is very general; and in many cases the value of improvements far exceed the requirements of law. Whilst this statement is true as a rule, it is found that