

Instructors for culling stock, mating breeding-birds, and giving general advice, also for judging at poultry shows, that it has been impossible to anything like comply with all the requests made. It is hoped, however, that with the additional assistance provided the future demand will be met. Mr. Brown, Chief Poultry Instructor, was for some considerable time laid aside with illness, having been subjected to a severe attack of influenza, but it is satisfactory to record that he has so far recovered as to be able to resume his duties with his characteristic enthusiasm and thoroughness.

RABBITS AND NOXIOUS WEEDS.

The scheme of reorganization instituted in the Department and recently brought into effect has made this Division responsible for the administration of the Rabbit Nuisance Act and the Noxious Weeds Act. As, however, the duties appertaining thereto were not wholly taken over until after the end of January, I am not in a position to say anything regarding the past year's operations under these Acts, and therefore append hereto a report by the Assistant Director of the late Fields Division under the headings of "Rabbits" and "Noxious Weeds" respectively.

As you are aware, the Rabbit Nuisance Act was recently amended in the direction of reducing the acreage specified in the original Act as necessary before the formation of a ratepayers' Rabbit Board could be possible. This amendment should be of considerable assistance where the destruction of the pest is desired to be seriously undertaken by the settlers, as, provided the majority of the ratepayers comprises at least ten, any area of from 2,000 acres upwards may be constituted a Rabbit Board district on a petition signed by the majority of the ratepayers in the district affected being received.

A further amendment made was by repealing the penalty sections of the Act, and substituting a new section increasing the maximum fine for a first conviction and imposing a minimum fine for each subsequent conviction. Greater powers are also given under the amendment to the Inspector. While it is admitted that the powers given may be drastic, the country, as regards the rabbit pest, has become in such a condition partly, I fully believe, through the weakness of the clauses so repealed—that more drastic powers had become absolutely necessary if certain districts were not to be given over entirely to the rabbit.

While it was necessary that greater powers as stated should be provided, it is not to be accepted that the Act will be administered in other than a strictly fair and impartial manner and with the utmost discretion. The rearrangement of the inspectorial staff provides for direct district control and supervision from the four chief centres, and the officers appointed to control these districts are officers who can be relied upon to carry out their duties with absolute fairness, and bring their own practical knowledge and sound common-sense to bear in the control of both the Rabbit and the Noxious Weeds Acts. The landowner who carries out his obligations in controlling these pests to the best of his ability will have nothing to fear from the Department, but an energetic forward movement has become imperative, and I trust that future results will clearly show that good work can be done without unduly harassing the land occupier, and to his ultimate good and the good of the Dominion.

REPORT BY THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE LATE FIELDS DIVISION ON RABBITS AND NOXIOUS WEEDS.

RABBITS.

Unfortunately, it cannot be said that the state of the pest has shown any improvement or diminution, but rather there has been a very decided increase both in the North and South Islands. Several causes have been accountable for this, and scarcity of labour, owing to war conditions, has principally been put forward by dilatory owners and others as one of the main causes for this increase. Still, it is always to be noticed that at a certain time, when trapping for export and canning becomes payable, men can be found in numbers to take up the work of destruction. In Central Otago freezing and canning works have been established, and as these no doubt bring in a large amount of revenue locally they are naturally looked upon as a benefit by all and sundry. Consequently owners find a great difficulty in procuring men at the proper time for laying poison. The latter do not care to enter on such work, preferring to wait a few months, when they know they can make much larger wages by trapping. Many owners appear to make this want of procuring men a strong excuse for not attending to their rabbits, but at the same time they do not hesitate to accept a bonus from interested parties for the right of trapping their lands. This has also a serious effect on other kinds of labour on account of the high wages made. The controversy of trapping *versus* poisoning and other ways of destruction still continues, and it is often suggested that the export of carcasses and skins of rabbits should be strictly prohibited. It is a question for consideration, but difficult to bring into equitable practice on account of heavy vested interests. Landowners seem slow to see the vast harm done to their properties by allowing the pest to become numerous, and they fail to recognize that it would be far more payable and pleasing to have clean properties, and have beef and mutton and other produce growing on the same land on which the herbage is now being eaten out and polluted by rabbits.

Certainly enormous numbers of rabbits are destroyed by trapping, and it would, on superficial judgment, appear that such would be a good course to pursue, but it has been decidedly shown that the reverse is the case. Poisoning by phosphorized pollard or oats, and the use of strychnine, is still recognized by experienced owners as being the cheapest and most effective means of dealing with the pest. Where this can be and is supplemented by other means and by a system of wire netting the pest speedily becomes a thing of the past. However, the price of netting is now so prohibitive that