

would be much lessened if some way could be devised of marking undressed skins submitted to local authorities for the purpose.

Mr. Dasent, secretary to the Wellington Acclimatization Society, and with him Mr. Willson, the society's ranger, do not think the difficulty of possession a serious one. If an opossum-trapper poaching a protected area has a base in an open district his movements would soon become known to the ranger, and steps could be taken to watch him. Nevertheless, it seems to me that in some districts the difficulty may be a serious one.

Regulation and Legislation.—If the value of the opossum trade is recognized, then it will be seen that there is a necessity for heavy penalties for those who deliberately break the law. At present an opossum-poacher is an offender against what is regarded as a game law, and he often receives a considerable amount of sympathy, concealed or unconcealed. In many cases he is in little danger of a serious punishment. The stealing of opossums ought to be regarded as an offence no less serious than the stealing of sheep. It is probable that to make this view effective legislation would be needed. I do not know whether all opossums are now the property of the Crown, or how far they vest in acclimatization societies, or what rights the landowner has. I think opossums should be the property of the Crown, which should give to landowners such rights upon such payments as shall from time to time be fixed by regulation. If legislation is needed it should, in my opinion, be enacted at the earliest possible date, and in the meantime the best regulations that the present law permits should be brought into operation. If a definition of "opossum" is wanted it should probably be as follows: "Opossum," or "Australian opossum," shall mean a member of the genus *Trichosurus*, whether *T. vulpecula* (either grey or brown) or the short-eared *T. canina*.

XII. CONFERENCE.

It is of the utmost importance that every step in the initiation of what ought to prove a most valuable trade shall be taken as carefully as possible, nothing that can be foreseen being left to afterthought. I recommend, therefore, that the proposals I am submitting, and with regard to which I have already consulted many men who have knowledge, should be discussed by a conference of representative men who know. Such a discussion may show weaknesses or omissions that individual consultation has failed to discover. The proposed conference should, I think, be constituted somewhat as follows: A representative of the Internal Affairs Department; a representative of the Forestry Department; a representative of the Lands and Survey Department; a representative of the Horticultural Division of the Agriculture Department; a professional member of the Crown Law Department; two representatives of acclimatization societies; two representatives of the fur-dealers of Dunedin; two rangers, or ex-rangers, chosen by the acclimatization societies; Ranger O'Neill, Crown Lands Ranger of Otago; a representative of the Fruitgrowers' Federation; and, finally, Constable Heywood, of Owaka, who has had much experience of the difficulties that at present exist. A man with practical experience in trapping, or perhaps two such men, might with advantage be added to the conference. I suggest Mr. John Calder, of Catlin's, and Mr. E. C. Evans, of Orari Gorge. The Department of Internal Affairs should appoint the chairman, either from the personnel of the conference or not, and should attach to the conference a stenographer. I think that I could be of some use on such a conference if it could be held at a time when I could attend. Reports on the opossum question in the Australian States should be available.

The conference should report especially on the date and duration of an open season, on the question of licensing regulations, and on the development of the trade generally, the proposals that I have submitted serving as a basis of discussion. The meeting could take place in Wellington or in Dunedin—preferably in Wellington—and the work could probably be concluded in two or three days. The cost would probably be from £150 to £200.

XIII. CONDITION OF OPOSSUMS AT VARIOUS SEASONS.

I make the following suggestion with a view to determining with some certainty what is the best time for an open season, although not with a view to postponing the declaration of an open season in May, June, and July of this year if the rangers recommend it and if the present law permits it. The suggestion is that from three districts of New Zealand—Paraparaumu, Orari Gorge, and Catlin's district—opossums should be sent to Wellington, dead or alive, in each month from March to September inclusive. Six opossums should be sent from each district to ensure the likelihood that both males and females would be present and that animals of a fair average condition are sent. If these animals were sent immediately to me I could make the necessary examination with regard to the state of gestation or the actual development of the young. This is very important in view of the desirability of fixing an open season, if possible, so as to obviate the destruction of young animals, while at the same time securing skins at their best or nearly their best. The skin of each animal could be numbered or branded. The necessary notes as to the condition of the animal and the skin could be registered, and the skins could then be preserved for reference in the settling of doubtful questions.

In addition to the expense that would be involved in the sending of these animals to Wellington, it would be necessary to provide some one who could immediately come to Victoria College to skin them on my telephoning him, and to provide for the tanning of the skins. In addition to the obvious advantage in the interests of humanity and economy that such a course might ensure, the possession of typical skins taken at various times might conduce to the settlement of questions arising in legal actions with regard to skins.

XIV. GREAT ALPINE RANGE.

The Otago Acclimatization Society and other bodies have urged upon the Government in the past the desirability of stocking with opossums the forests on either side of the Great Alpine Range. I strongly recommend this course. Here are great areas of forest, much of which will never pay for felling or milling on account of inaccessibility and the broken nature of the country, and in some cases of the low milling-value of the accessible timber. The country should suit opossums well. It might be made a great fur-bearing country, enabling the fur trade to reach proportions at least equal to those attained by the Tasmanian trade—say, over £200,000 a year.