

Continual warfare is necessarily waged against rats and opossums. Although the opossums are being reduced in numbers, the extermination of rats is a difficult proposition. Over 160 rats were destroyed during the year, most of which were caught in traps set for the purpose, the others having been shot. A wild cat was sighted in June, but has not been seen again, although careful search has been made for it.

During the year a motor-launch was provided for use by Mr. Wilkinson, and this will prove to be invaluable to him in his work. Moorings have been put down in the bay north of Rangatira, and a slip-way and boat-shed have been erected opposite the moorings.

In September Lady Alice Fergusson paid her third and final visit to Kapiti. Her Excellency is a most enthusiastic naturalist, and spent most of her time amongst the birds and bush, but also found time to sketch some of the more historic points of the island, in which she was intensely interested. Her Excellency was accompanied by Countess Thelma Mataxa; Captain Orr-Ewing; Mr. W. H. Field, M.P.; Mr. E. Phillips Turner, Director of Forestry; and Mr. L. O. H. Tripp, president of the Wellington Acclimatization Society. Beautiful weather prevailed during the trip, and the party journeyed to the summit of the island and were also taken round it in the launch.

I append hereto an extract from the caretaker's (Mr. A. S. Wilkinson) report for the year:—

“All round the coast, but more especially on the eastern side of the island, taupata is making good progress. This is very noticeable when travelling between Waiorua and Wharekohu, but can also be noticed at the very south end of the island. On the western side, which is so much exposed to westerly gales, and where most of the goats and wild sheep used to be, and where most of the plant covering had been destroyed by these animals, plants are slowly but surely re-establishing themselves. Taupata, kowhai, akeake, puka, rata, koromiko, and wharariki are following up tauhinu on the steep faces and cliffs. From the top manuka is creeping down this steep side. The open grass areas are also being gradually covered by shrubs. The Taapiro Valley, which has the largest area of grass, is being closed in by tauhinu, manuka, whauwhaupaku, and other more useful plants. Fuchsia is occupying all the damper parts of this valley, besides mahoe and the fine-leaved koromiko, of which several very large trees are growing on the ridge adjoining Taapiro. Other places, which a few years ago were practically all grass, are now almost covered with the tauhinu, amongst which can be seen shrubs of all descriptions, hundreds of acres being thickly strewn with young plants, principally akeake sown by the wind, as well as cabbage-tree (*Cordyline australis*), houhou, horoeka, and others.

“Since the extirpation of goats and sheep has allowed the undergrowth, which is so essential to the welfare of the bush, to make such headway many of the smaller plants, such as ferns, are spreading through the forests. The beautiful kidney-fern (*Trichomanes reniforme*) can be seen now in places where a few years ago it was either absent or represented by very poor specimens. *Leptolepia novae-zelandiae*, another beautiful fern, is to be seen now in places where the ground was absolutely bare of growth a few years back. I have also come across many patches of that especially beautiful *Hymenophyllum australe*, which was decidedly hard to find even three years ago. Another plant, which Cheeseman calls “a very remarkable and beautiful species,” the *Senecio Kirkii*, is also coming up in several places. Though fairly common in most parts of the North Island, where it is often found growing as an epiphyte, it is rare on Kapiti, and most of the plants are growing on the ground.

“The abundant rainfall was responsible for the best display of flowers that I have seen during the last five years. The show of, firstly, the heketara (*Olearia Cunninghamii*), followed by the fiery blooms of the rata, was a glorious one. During the flowering of the rata the honey-eating birds were in their glory. It was quite a common thing to see upwards of two dozen tui in one tree, and korimako and kaka were also numerous. Nearly every rata was in bloom—not just a few, as in previous years. Those closest to the sea flowered first, and as these finished so others started at a higher altitude, until only a line of scarlet was to be seen towards the summit of the island. Though not so conspicuous during the flowering period as the two species above mentioned, the other berry-bearing trees flowered equally well, and more than made up the balance in the display of fruit. The karaka, which is everywhere abundant on the island, was loaded with the lovely yellow berries. The tawa, miro, matai, and hinau, to mention only the largest trees, were covered with berries.

“The abundance of food naturally has a stimulating effect on bird-life, and this has been the case with the birds of Kapiti during the last season. The almost continual rainfall during the last season not only caused an abnormal growth of leaf and flower, to be followed later by a superabundance of fruit, but it was responsible for an increase in the supply of insect food. Thus the birds which live more or less on insects were in better condition to carry out their important functions than they have been for some time. This is shown by the noted increase in such species as the whitehead, tom'it, and the rare North Island robin. The tomtits which come about our house, and with which we have been intimately acquainted for the last five years, were able to rear two families. Previously they were able to rear only one young bird during the period mentioned, and this was in the 1928–29 season. In 1927 they reared a family of three until the young ones had been out of the nest five days, when they were taken by that terror of small birds, the long-tailed cuckoo, despite the efforts of myself and family to drive the pest away. The long-tailed cuckoo was much scarcer on Kapiti last season compared with previous ones, and I believe the success of the smaller birds in rearing young was largely due to this fact. Korimako and tui were also successful with their breeding, many young birds of both species being noted. No young saddlebacks were noticed, but, as they are birds that do not call much, they are easily passed by. The pigeon seems to be holding its own in spite of the fact that many leave the island and never get a chance to return. Dozens of these birds can be seen on the karaka, feasting on the berries. The kakariki, especially the red-headed species, show a decided increase in numbers. Many families of young are to be seen in the bush. They secure a good deal of food from grass-seeds, and with berries to help them are assured of food in plenty throughout the year.