

CENTRAL OTAGO . . .

All through the tussock country small, isolated communities of native grasses have managed to survive in places such as rock crevices and damp areas. Where rabbits could not kill them out these plants are now recovering rapidly and are setting and shedding their seed. Within a few years a marked increase in the native grasses can confidently be expected. Blue wheat grass, fescue, silver and blue tussocks, and plume grass are now conspicuous in areas where a few years ago only odd plants were seen.

With an abundance of rabbits and → a low rainfall flats such as this were bared of almost all vegetation except scabweed.

New Era

All in all there is every indication that within the next 10 years or so the depleted country of Central Otago will be transformed. Already annual grasses and clovers have started to replace the scabweed and there is every reason to believe that on much of the country perennial grasses and legumes will replace much of the annual grass.

The easing of grazing pressure on the plant cover by the destruction of rabbits has brought one problem in its train: The better conditions assist the growth of some weeds as much as they benefit useful species. This was foreseen a number of years ago when in enclosed areas unpalatable plants such as sweet brier, matagouri, and native broom became established.

For some years the Department of Agriculture has been experimenting with various chemicals with the object of controlling sweet brier. Considerable progress has been made and established bushes can be controlled individually, but no satisfactory method has yet been found for controlling seedling plants economically.

Over the years small plots which → were fenced off from grazing showed that a number of different grasses could be grown successfully. Now that rabbits have been controlled there is no reason why the lessons learnt from the fenced plots cannot be applied to large areas.

The future of the depleted land of Central Otago has never looked brighter. Native grasses are regenerating and the sowing of introduced grasses and legumes has passed beyond the experimental stage. A watch must, however, be kept on the ingress of unpalatable plants, such as brier, gorse, and broom, which unless checked when in small amounts could eventually take charge.

