

station, on the Oreti. Leaving this river to the left, we passed through the Wairaki Downs, near Bastian's station and Stevens and Raymond's stations, touching the Aparima again by Johnson's station, near Wroy's Bush, and crossing the Oreti district to the town of Winton, on that river, and thence to Invercargill. This portion may be called the Centre District.

It will thus appear that we have personally visited a very large portion of the Southland country reputed to be more or less infested with rabbits; and those portions which we have not visited, such as the Dome, Long Ridge, and the plains watered by the Five Rivers—which may be embraced in the Eastern and Centre Districts—we have received such reliable information as fully to satisfy us of their condition. We have placed ourselves in communication with all persons, whatever their vocation, from whom it was likely that we should be able to gather authentic data, and we have been much indebted to the pastoral tenants of the Crown for the fulness and confidence of their communications. We should be doing an injustice to some of these gentlemen were we to indicate with any precision the localities most severely affected, nor would any good to the community result from such definition. We have, therefore, deemed it judicious, for the purposes of this report, to divide the country into large areas, and of these it may be sufficient to say that the Western, northern portion of the Eastern, and Central Districts are most severely affected.

DIVISION OF REPORT.

It will perhaps be more convenient, for purposes of reference, that the report should be divided in several distinct branches, viz. :—

- I. The first appearance of the rabbits in Southland, and their progress through the country.
- II. The extent of country occupied by them, and the evils which accompany this occupation.
- III. The peculiar difficulties which attend the attempt to arrest or exterminate them.
- IV. The nature of the methods now in operation, and the apparent results.
- V. The means adopted elsewhere, and the results.
- VI. The suggestions which have been made towards arresting the evil.

FIRST INTRODUCTION OF RABBITS.

I.—So far as we have been able to learn, the rabbit made its first appearance about twelve years since among the sandhills in the neighbourhood of Invercargill, on the tract of country immediately contiguous to the sea, on the Riverton Beach Road, which was at that time a finely grassed and valuable sheep country. Here they appear to have remained for several years quietly, and at first almost insensibly disturbing the soil, until, from the increase of their numbers, they not only destroyed the grass, but converted the rolling sward into exposed, shifting, and barren sandhills. From time to time the settlers in more remote parts of the country entrapped and carried with them a few pairs of rabbits to their several localities, considering their presence a desirable acquisition, and thus multiplied the centres of propagation. The main body of the rabbits, having laid waste the country where they first appeared, moved up the banks of rivers and their tributary streams, camping, as it were, on rich well-grassed lands, and only passing onwards when the pasture became scanty, and the land defiled and poisoned. Gradually, and at first scarcely perceptibly, the rabbits moved from place to place until, during the past two years, there appears to have been a vast impulse given to their migration, when at length their presence has become a subject of bitter regret, and the cause of much and increasing anxiety. They may be found swarming, in suitable places, on the banks of rivers; creating havoc on the sunny grassy uplands; surmounting the highest ranges; and, in smaller numbers, their pioneers have been seen on the banks of the Greenstone River, beyond Lake Wakatipu, on their way to the West Coast. We have found them in great numbers on one side of a river, while the other side was comparatively free from them; for, though they follow up the main stream, as a general rule, and turn the head waters, still there are many known instances which indicate that they transfer their ravages from one side to another with great suddenness and rapidity. They chiefly dwell on the banks of rivers and creeks, the outskirts of forests, and the neighbourhood of rocky ranges, whence they can descend into the uplands and grassy plains, from which they return, when disturbed, to their place of refuge.

EXTENT OF COUNTRY AFFECTED BY THEM, AND EVILS ATTENDING THEIR OCCUPATION.

II.—With respect to the extent of country occupied by the rabbits, and the evils which accompany their occupation, we may safely say that, so far as our personal observation has extended, the whole of Southland may be regarded as more or less infested. Where the country is favourable for their occupation—that is, well grassed, well sheltered, and not cold nor damp—there rabbits may be seen in vast numbers; while in the open country, where means are constantly and effectively used to exterminate them, they are kept within moderate bounds; but what may be a true description of the state of any part of the country this year may not be such a year or two hence. In the neighbourhood of Riverton Beach, for instance, rabbits are less numerous than they were; while, in places where only a few were seen a short time back, as in the Dunstan District, they may be now seen in vast numbers. Again, in the Maerewhenua country, in the North of Otago, where they have been known to have existed for thirteen years, they have not increased; while in the Tapanui country they are represented to be alarmingly numerous. It is very evident that the stream of migration from the South is being met by a similar stream from the North.

The evils which result from the occupation of the country by rabbits in considerable numbers are many and varied. It will perhaps suffice that we should state some of the chief of them.

Expense attending Destruction.

The expense of exterminating the rabbit is becoming a very serious item. Take for instance a run where, three years since, scarcely a rabbit was to be seen: there are now sixteen men, with 120 dogs, employed, costing the lessee 2d. for each rabbit skin and 10s. a week for each man. On this run the average number of rabbits killed weekly is between 4,000 and 5,000, and, though 36,000 were killed last year, yet the report is that there is no appreciable decrease. On another run, we learn that close