

147 Are many sheep lost by poisoning?—I have known of two or three instances. I do not think that a very serious consideration if the poison is laid down properly

148. Can you give any estimate of the cost of poisoning per 1,000 acres?—I think the Committee can easily get better information on that than I can give.

149. What percentage does the return of skins bear to the cost of keeping down the pest?—That, of course, would vary with different circumstances. Take my own case. The cost of the man and appliances is about £120 a year; and I could not reckon upon getting more than £10 for the skins. Where rabbits were very numerous, and poison was used, the yield from the skins would be greater than the cost of getting them. I can only give a general answer to that question. The practice largely differs. Where contract men are employed, in some cases they are supplied with poisoned grain, in other cases they are supplied with provisions. That would mean that the value of the skins is nearly, if not quite, equal to the cost of getting them.

150. The proportion in your case is £10 to £120?—Yes.

151. What do you think of introducing natural enemies; and which would you suggest?—I have paid very great attention to this, and am thoroughly satisfied this is the only solution of the difficulty. I was eight or nine months in England recently, and I left no stone unturned to get the best information I could on this point. The general evidence of all most competent to speak was, that where game was left to take care of itself there would be no trouble from rabbits. I am convinced that weasels and stoats would settle the difficulty, without any interference.

152. *Hon. Mr. Martin.*] What would they live on when the rabbits were all dead?—Mice, rats, frogs, and numerous other things. They have sparrows and many small birds at Home. With regard to the evidence of Mr. Jackson before the Committee, I may say I lived in what was almost purely a sheep district at Home, until I came to the colony, and I never heard of any authenticated case of injury to lambs from weasels and stoats. It seems to me an utter absurdity to think any serious damage could come from these things. These stories about lambs being seized by weasels, stoats, and ferrets are like the story of the three black crows. I am thoroughly convinced there need be no fear from that cause.

153. *The Chairman.*] From your personal knowledge, you do not know of any case at Home?—No; I could never trace an authentic case where these animals proved destructive to lambs.

154. You are alluding to stoats and weasels?—Yes.

155. And as to ferrets and polecats?—I have seen very few polecats. By the time I left England they had been pretty well exterminated by the gamekeepers as a nuisance to game. The last specimen I saw was one killed on a sheep-farm by a farmer merely for fun, not that it was of any harm.

156. *Hon. Mr. Peter.*] Do you not think the enormous rate of increase out here might have a different effect than in England with these animals?—I do not think that would be a difficulty. These animals breed once a year at Home; rabbits breed a number of times a year, and their increase is simply limited only by the feeding-power: the same with hares. At Home or here, where free from natural enemies, the rabbits' increase is only limited by feed and climate.

157 But would these animals, after the rabbits were gone, destroy the game and fowls of all kinds which keep down the insects, and so cause an increase of insects that would be very destructive?—I do not think that. At Home, though I lived where there were many weasels, I do not remember a case of losing a single fowl. We never saw the weasels about the homestead, except when there was a sudden fall of snow or a prolonged hard frost, and then they would be seen about the stackyards and the stone fences, looking for rats and mice. They would suck eggs, certainly, and that would be the principal damage if they got into the fowlhouses, but that would be very easily guarded against.

158. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Might not the reason of lambs not being attacked by them at Home be, that there the sheep are brought into enclosures to lamb?—That was never done in my part of the country any more than here. It was mostly hilly country, and sheep were as little attended to at lambing as here: they were left in the open.

159. Do you think foxes would prove a nuisance?—Where there were foxes at Home the farmers certainly thought they were a nuisance. I may point out a rather extraordinary fact in connection with foxes. When we had foxes in my own district at Home we had no rabbits. In that part of the country there were no rabbits until the year 1853. Within half a dozen years they had spread all over the place, and every winter they had to be tackled the same way as here, where game was preserved. Where game was not preserved, rabbits never gave any trouble whatever, and that was upon farms that produce the best sheep in the district. So strongly do I feel on this question of the natural enemies, that when I was in England I trapped five weasels, but it being the wrong season I could do nothing with them. I have a subscription list here that we have started in our district for the introduction of natural enemies, and, though it has not yet been sent round to any extent, we have already £250: and we expect the Government to aid us in this when we show ourselves ready to help ourselves. We have no doubt it is perfectly feasible if gone about in the right way.

160. Has your district been under the Rabbit Nuisance Act? Does it work satisfactorily?—The district is under the Act, and it works very unsatisfactorily. In reply to a telegram from this Committee, at the last meeting of the Trustees we went as fully into the question as time would permit in the way of suggesting amendments. We drew up some, which should have been here by now. (*See Appendix No. 7.*)

161. *The Chairman.*] They will be here no doubt, and they will express your own views?—Yes.

162. On whom do you think the onus should rest of proving that efficient remedial means have been taken?—The great difficulty we have had to contend with is as to the different meanings of the word "efficient." That has been the stumbling-block all along. The Trustees have felt thoroughly satisfied that the steps taken have not been sufficient, but the evidence has been so conflicting that the landowner, in almost every case, has got the benefit of the doubt. The consequence has been that hitherto £5 has been the maximum fine in our district. I feel quite satisfied that some such clause is required in an amended Act as is contained in the Sheep Act, so that the Inspector's opinion—his dictum, as it were—as to whether or not sufficient steps have been taken in sufficient time to clean the sheep, is taken as final. The Court cannot get behind that, and the fine is there.