

1886.
NEW ZEALAND.

THE ANNUAL SHEEP RETURNS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MAY, 1885.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

Mr. B. P. BAYLY to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

Colonial Secretary's Office (Stock Branch), Wellington, 14th May, 1886.

I have the honour to lay before you the annual sheep returns for the year ending the 31st May, 1885.

The total number of sheep in the colony on that date was 14,546,801, as against 13,978,520, or an increase of 568,281, on return of the previous year.

In the several districts the increase or decrease during the year has been as follows : Auckland, increase, 30,465 ; Napier, increase, 64,496 ; Taranaki, decrease, 3,712 ; Wanganui, increase, 10,970 ; Rangitikei, increase, 7,626 ; Wellington, increase, 43,837 ; Nelson, increase, 25 ; Marlborough, decrease, 14,179 ; Canterbury, increase, 331,213 ; Otago, increase, 97,540.

Although the effects of the rabbit-pest have been severely felt during the past season, yet returns show in Otago an increase of 97,540 sheep for the year. It will be also seen that the Counties of Southland and Wallace, originally the hotbed of the plague, and where it originated, again this year, show a considerable increase.

The Lake County shows again a decrease, although not so large as in former years, and is in a great measure attributable to the present low price of wool, with rabbits as well as keas to contend against.

The infected list for the year ending the 31st March shows 13 owners with an aggregate of 139,000 sheep, as against 16 owners and 112,000 sheep for last year ; one cause of this increase was alluded to in my last year's return. Subsequent again to that, at shearing-time, the Kekerangu flock, numbering 50,000, were found to be infected through scabby sheep having crossed the Clarence River. With these exceptions no other outbreak has taken place, and the cause of these reinfections having been removed (destruction of wild and stray sheep), that these flocks are either now or very soon will be clean is an assured fact.

It is with satisfaction I am able to report that the North Island is now thoroughly free from disease, and the several flocks having stood the test of a shearing-muster, together with a systematic and close inspection, the fact of this portion of the colony being clean may be considered thoroughly established.

The whole of the Pieton Subdivision is also on the clean list, nor is any further outbreak likely to occur again in that country.

Nelson shows this year four owners on the infected list, with 9,000 sheep, as against nil last year. The outbreak was referred to in last report as at Tophouse, and the infection traced to three adjoining flocks. These sheep have hitherto been unfenced, and had free access to the back rough country. A different state of affairs is now established. All these flocks are within fences, with the exception of 2,000 at Tophouse, which are being shepherded. The adjacent country has been thoroughly scoured, and wild sheep and stragglers destroyed.

In accordance with the vote passed last session for the destruction of wild sheep, this work has been vigorously prosecuted during last season, and with good results. The whole of the waste lands of the Crown, together with unstocked country at Kaikoura, has been dealt with. D'Urville and Arapawa Islands, as well as the whole country between Queen Charlotte Sound to Tophouse, and other waste lands in Nelson, have been explored and scoured for wild sheep and stragglers.

At Kaikoura compensation at the rate of 2s. 6d. per head has been allowed for the destruction of the Kincaid flock, numbering 5,429, another flock (Waipapa) of 4,000 were destroyed by the owner, 4,200 wild sheep and stragglers killed, and two gangs of musters are still out rescouring the country.

From the number of wild sheep and stragglers destroyed here, of which many were diseased, it will readily be seen that, had not this work been done, any possibility of the adjacent country ever being clean became very remote.