

1886.
NEW ZEALAND.

THE RABBIT NUISANCE

(ANNUAL REPORT ON), BY THE SUPERINTENDING INSPECTOR.

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, 29th May, 1886.

In furnishing my annual report on the steps taken for the extermination of rabbits, and the results obtained, I regret to be compelled to state that matters have not progressed as satisfactorily towards the destruction of the pest, nor is the outlook as favourable, as has been the case in previous years.

An unprecedentedly hot and dry summer, during which there was no rainfall sufficient to destroy the "stops" or to a certain extent check the increase, has been attended with very unsatisfactory results—in fact, during the last three months the increase has been far in excess of anything experienced during previous seasons.

No doubt the winter poisoning will again reduce the numbers, but the question arises, Where is this annual tax to end?

I am still of the opinion I held three years ago, that no scheme has yet been propounded that effectually deals with the question; and I adhere to the suggestion I made in 1883, that a reward should be offered sufficiently large to induce scientists to give the matter their attention. In these days of enlightenment and research it is more than probable that a disease peculiar to the rabbit, or some other means, might be discovered which would furnish a wholesale yet inexpensive method of destruction. Some time ago I observed that the South Australian Government had sent to Germany for the purpose of introducing rabbits infested with a species of scabies peculiar to them, and which is said to destroy great numbers of them, and, from its debilitating effect, reduces their breeding power enormously. It is something in this direction that should be sought after. Even if a poison were discovered that could be freely used in summer a great stride towards keeping the pest in check would be attained; nor do I see why the difficulties here should be insurmountable.

Let an experimental branch be established, for one year, under the charge of a thoroughly-qualified chemist, and assisted by men practically acquainted with the rabbit. It is quite evident that to obtain permanent relief a different procedure is required from what is at present available. Why should not this be attempted? Surely the chance of something beneficial being obtained should be possible.

That the natural enemy is helping considerably in checking the increase of the rabbits, and in some places keeping them completely within bounds, is undoubted. Their adoption as one means of destruction is rapidly gaining ground, and is favourably reported upon; but they require to be turned out in large numbers and the ground worked systematically before they become effective: even then the transition stage must necessarily take a long time prior to a balance being attained.

Ferrets have this year again been turned out in considerable numbers, and are becoming widely spread throughout the whole rabbit areas. In Marlborough alone some thousands are used. The great drawback to success is the want of method in dealing with the rabbit ground. Except in the poisoning season, no established rule seems to be adopted. Some persons turn out a few ferrets, whose number are totally inadequate to cope with the number of rabbits on the area to be dealt with, and because the rabbits do not decrease ferrets are condemned.

Dogs, fumigating, and other means are resorted to as well, which at once insures the destruction of the natural enemy.

The supply of ferrets should be kept up annually, nor should any be turned out until the pest has in the first instance been greatly reduced in numbers. Even as far south as the Waiau, in Southland, they are doing well, and as many as were procurable have been placed on waste lands in that locality. All young and healthy ones which were offered for sale to the department have been purchased and utilized in a similar manner in other localities.