

It may be interesting to record the results obtained from the first shipment of weasels which arrived here in 1884.

They were turned out on a peninsula containing about eight thousand acres at the Wanaka Lake. Shortly after their release a diminution of the rabbits in the neighbourhood was apparent. Last year only a portion of this peninsula was poisoned, and this year the rabbits are reported to be still fewer. It is proposed not to poison at all on this block this winter, and watch the result. Where the weasels were originally placed scarcely a rabbit is to be seen until the extreme end of the ground is reached, or the furthest point from where they were released. In this case, should the result be satisfactory, it means that an area of badly-infested country eight thousand acres in extent has been permanently cleared at an expenditure of about £500.

In other localities where these animals have been liberated the same conditions do not exist. They were neither turned out in a large number at one spot, nor were they, as on the peninsula, confined to certain limits; consequently the results have not been so manifest: but, at the same time, rabbits killed by them have been found repeatedly.

During the year one shipment of 82 stoats and 126 weasels were landed to the order of the Government, and distributed as follows: Part on Wilkin River, at the head of Lake Wanaka; part on the east side of Makarora River; another lot on the Naumann Range, head of Lake Ohau; remainder on the Waitaki River—in equal portions at each place. Two other shipments, consigned to private individuals, were introduced during the last twelve months, numbering, respectively, 116 weasels and 32 stoats, and 167 weasels and 55 stoats. The former were distributed partly in Marlborough and West Wairarapa, and the latter in West Wairarapa, on Messrs. Riddiford's station. I hear that rabbits destroyed by these animals have been repeatedly found, but sufficient time has not yet elapsed since their liberation to speak definitely as to the result.

This year I again visited the head of the Wanaka, and Haast Saddle, and there is no doubt that the rabbits have increased since last year, especially towards the saddle; but on both runs near it—lower down the lake—they have been reduced considerably. Considering the large extent of high, rough, and unstocked lands which exist here, I fully anticipated to have found the pest even worse than it was. All the low-lying lands can be effectually dealt with during the winter by poison, but there will still remain vast wastes where nothing but the natural enemy can be of any service.

Having heard that rabbits were making their appearance on the Dobson River, at the head of Lake Ohau, I proceeded there. The eastern side of the lake and the Dobson River may be considered as almost free; but the pest is undoubtedly established on the western side of the river to its junction with the Hopkins River; and on the north side of Hopkins River they are very few, from that towards the Gorge. I do not think they could ever get back in any number towards Mount Cook, as the country is principally birch bush, and beyond that glaciers and rapid rivers. Under these circumstances they can never swarm the country at once, as has happened elsewhere. Between Ben Ohau and the junction of the Hopkins with the Dobson River floods at any time may spread them on to the adjacent country east of the Dobson. This I consider the key to the whole of the McKenzie Country, and consequently of South Canterbury. This point requires closer supervision than any other part of the southern districts. The rabbits on the Hopkins River must have come in from the head of the Hawea Lake and Hunter River. Here, unfortunately, a large block surrounded by high, rough, unoccupied country has been thrown up, and has become overrun with the pest. The department will poison it this winter by contract.

In the Amuri District, between Canterbury and Marlborough, on the Guide and Acheron Rivers, an increase of the pest threatening serious consequences to a large area of pastoral country has occurred.

This influx has been of the most sudden nature, and, the area infested being comparatively great within a very short period, leads me to the conclusion that it has been in a great measure attributable to the numbers of ferrets that have been liberated on the Clarence River and in that direction during the past two years. The rabbits found here are reported to be principally silver greys. This unmistakably proves that the majority of them are from the Kaikoura direction.

Some two months ago a small colony of rabbits were known to be on the Amuri side of the Clarence River. Steps were taken at once, and they were supposed to be checked. The country adjoining has been twice visited this year, and nothing reported to arouse suspicion. This is undoubtedly a case of great import, and one that requires specially to be dealt with. From the formation of this country steps to check the pest not available in other localities are possible here. Rabbit-proof fencing has been found to afford a certain amount of protection where an influx of this description impends, and a line of considerable length could be erected here on the margin of the threatened country, and which could extend outside the line of their advance. If not a complete bar, it would at least hinder the pest from making a rapid advance, and thus facilitate their destruction at the boundary.

With this fencing, aided by the breeding and liberation of the ferret in as large numbers as possible, I am strongly of opinion that here decided and prompt action may be attended with a reasonable hope of success, and the further encroachment of the pest at least stayed.

Having referred to rabbit-proof fencing as an adjunct to keeping the pest within bounds, I may mention that many persons hold the opinion that this description of fence should be