

Awatere Subdivision. The rabbits that were in the district before have not increased to any great extent. Means were taken to keep them down, except in one corner—the lower portion of the Clarence runs.

762. What in regard to them?—That was a portion of country that was unstocked. It was not till we had our wild-sheep musters on the country that we found the rabbits had increased to such an extent as they had. The silver-greys have crossed the Clarence and gone over the range into the Awatere, and have worked up. Those are what are threatening Canterbury.

763. Mr. Bullen's run has acted as a buffer, you think?—Yes. The rabbits first started from Mr. Kean's run. From there they spread on to Mr. Bullen's run to a very large extent. Mr. Bullen turned out a large number of ferrets, with the result that it has kept the rabbits completely down on the whole of his run; but the ferrets appear to have driven the rabbits over on to the sunny side of the Kaikoura Range—on to the Clarence runs; and from there from the sandy river-bed flats they have crossed the Clarence on to the Kekerangu Run, and spread up to the Elliot River, and over the high portion of the range into the head of the Awatere. Now I may say there is a line of thirty or forty miles where you would find more or less rabbit-signs every two hundred yards. They are not actually numerous, but they are in a line right across the country.

764. These are all silver-greys?—Yes.

765. The ordinary brown rabbit, which is at the mouth of the Awatere, apparently has not mixed with them?—They have not mixed at that end.

766. Do you think the silver-grey rabbits are the hardier and more active rabbits?—They are very similar in their habits. I think the Southland rabbits and Flaxbourne rabbits are the same. But there is another rabbit, supposed to be the tame rabbit gone wild, which is not nearly so bad.

767. There seems no reason to show why the ordinary rabbits should not spread as the silver-greys have done?—I attribute that to this: that the other rabbits are not so hardy, and do not go so high up the ranges. The rabbits have spread across the Conway in a few isolated patches south of Mr. Bullen's, but only in twos or threes. There is a great deal of manuka and fern on it, and I think they have bred before they were noticed by the shepherds. The rabbits will spread in front of ferrets for five or six miles.

768. Do you know why they have not spread in greater numbers?—I attribute that to Mr. Bullen's action in turning out the natural enemy in such abundant numbers.

769. And, again, that the rabbits would not live on the southern face of the range?—Yes; they do not like the damp, shady faces.

770. So that Mr. Bullen's run offered a material obstacle to their getting south?—Yes.

771. What suggestion are you offering now with regard to keeping these rabbits back. I see you mention in your report you consider it a serious matter, the rabbits coming into North Canterbury?—The only suggestion I have to make is in regard to wire-netting fencing. I look upon it as an absolute necessity. Although turning out ferrets, cats, stoats, and weasels, and laying down poison, may destroy the rabbits to a great extent, still it keeps spreading them; and I think the wire-fencing, if properly looked after—say a man placed to watch at intervals of eight or ten miles on the average, according to the country it goes through—would be useful, and assist the natural enemies very much.

772. And do you think it would have the effect of keeping the rabbits out?—I think so.

773. Would not rabbits be able to get over it?—I believe they would burrow under in places if not looked after. But I would have a man along the fence every day, also a man to watch the river flood-gates.

774. By what means do you propose that this fence should be raised?—I have no proposition to make in regard to that. As a Government officer I have nothing to do with the finance.

775. You say the rabbits have increased during the last two years in one particular part of the Clarence runs?—Yes. They are called the Warden and Tytler Runs. The department has possession of the runs now to clean the flocks of scab.

776. Who is now killing rabbits there?—The department.

777. When did you take that over?—On the 22nd February last.

778. Was there any delay on the part of the department from any cause in taking it over or seeing that the rabbits were being killed?—I should hardly say there was any delay. I reported the matter to the Government immediately; and the difficulty was to ascertain our position—whether the power to take possession to clean flocks constituted the department occupiers of the run within the meaning of the Rabbit Act.

779. When did you take it over under the Sheep Act?—I obtained an order on the 19th February, and we commenced work on the 22nd in regard to the sheep. The next day I reported the matter to the Colonial Secretary in regard to the rabbits, and asked the question respecting the point indicated. While the question was being considered in Wellington we were making arrangements with regard to purchasing grain, ferrets, and so on. Really I could hardly say there was a day lost.

780. How long would it take you to get your supplies over there?—It is a very difficult matter. We first had to cart the grain over from Kaikoura, eighteen miles, and pack it over a range at £7 per ton; and from there to where the rabbits are worst it is a day and a half's packing again. The contractors killed three or four horses on the work.

781. Whom have you in charge there now?—Inspector Clifton is the manager both for rabbits and sheep. He is a very good officer, and has a man named Adair to see that the poisoning is carried out. They commenced poisoning at the latter end of April.

782. What means have you used for destroying rabbits?—When the ground is suitable for poisoning, that is the main thing we use—that is to say, when the feed is sufficiently short. We found the silver-greys take the wheat better than the oats; but in the Awatere the brown rabbits take oats better than wheat. Then I advocate the turning-out of natural enemies in large numbers at proper seasons.