

1888.
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 MINISTER of LANDS.

SIR,—

Crown Lands Department (Live Stock Branch), Wellington, 19th May, 1888.

I have the honour to furnish you with my annual rabbit nuisance report for the year ended 31st March, 1888,—

The situation respecting the rabbit nuisance is little altered from previous years; in some localities a decided headway is being made against the pest, whilst in others, although a check is being kept upon a rapid increase, yet there is no concealing the fact that each year rabbits are slowly and surely encroaching upon hitherto clear country.

In the North Island, in the Auckland District, from the North Cape until the Waikato is reached, no badly-infested country is known, although there are a few places where rabbits have been seen, but the conditions under which they exist are not favourable to their overrunning the country without absolute rabbit-farming being entered into; however, when the country in the Waikato, from Alexandra to the Puniu River is reached, a different state of affairs obtains. This area is better grassed, with conditions more favourable to the increase of the pest; and although comparatively limited in extent, there are a few places where the land can be termed badly infested, and on country where such should not be the case, unless attributable to gross neglect on the part of owners. Another drawback to satisfactory work being effected is owing to the number of small and comparatively valueless sections, either abandoned or unused by their owners, wherein cover of all descriptions is furnished for the pest. The difficulty of dealing with these properties is still further increased in ascertaining the whereabouts of the owners, and when found they frequently prove pecuniarily unable to comply with the requirements of the Act. When the number of privately-owned abandoned allotments to be dealt with by the department is taken into consideration, numbering some 180 owners, representing over eleven thousand acres, in blocks from fifty acres upwards, and within an area of thirty or forty miles, it can be readily seen that to deal with all these is no easy matter; independently of these, there are large numbers of Government sections scattered about also requiring the attention of the department together with the above. Most of the roads in this district are in a neglected state, being overrun with gorse and fern, and, as they bound the grass lands, could not be better situated for perpetuating the evil. Generally speaking in this country the population is large in comparison with areas owned, and rabbits should, with only ordinary exertion, be well kept under.

After crossing the Puniu River a sprinkling of rabbits is found through a good portion of the King Country, from Kihikihi to near Otorohonga, but in no very large numbers in any one place. This being all Maori country renders the adoption of ordinary means impossible, as, were poisoned grain resorted to, the Maori pigs, upon which the Natives mainly depend for food, would be destroyed. An expert was specially engaged to show the Maoris the method of trapping, but, from the number of pigs scattered over the country and the disinclination of the Maoris to adopt these means, it had to be discontinued. An inducement to the Maoris was then offered by the exchange of powder and shot for rabbit-skins. Even with this arrangement they became dissatisfied, and, as a last resource, a bonus of 3d. per skin was given for all rabbits destroyed by the Maoris within Native country. This course has proved, as yet, the most advantageous, and about four thousand skins, at a cost of some £50, were delivered within two months; and I must say the work has been more thoroughly done than I have witnessed elsewhere, as the rabbits are nearly all obtained by first burning off the cover, then digging the burrows out. A rabbit agent has been specially instructed to supervise this work, primarily with the object of keeping the Natives constantly engaged, as well as preventing skins from other than Native lands being brought forward for sale. From what I myself saw in the autumn, I am satisfied that if the same energy is displayed throughout the winter on the block rabbits will be reduced to a minimum.