

In the Hawke's Bay District matters are much the same as last season. The boundary-fence at Waimata has been extended several miles farther inland, and is still affording a good check to the advance of the rabbits from the Wairarapa. The Hawke's Bay Rabbit Board is administering the provisions of the Rabbit Act in a successful manner, using every exertion to prevent any increase of the pest within the district. The rabbits near the southern border, together with the few seen within its jurisdiction, should keep the Board fully on the alert. A very close supervision is being kept on the fence and its vicinity with good results; rabbits are not as yet in any numbers near the boundary, and as they appear have been destroyed, and, the natural enemy released, this fence has without doubt proved of very great benefit.

In the Wairarapa District a greater diminution of the pest has taken place, and fewer rabbits are to be observed at this season than has been the case for years past, and inquiries tend to show that some other factor has been at work besides ordinary methods of destruction. Four separate parasitic diseases have been found to exist—namely, bladder-fluke, coccidia, scabies, and lice; of these the bladder-fluke is evidently the most destructive, but none are of a virulent type in their present form. The whole matter has been intrusted to Professor Thomas, of Auckland University, for thorough investigation. This gentleman has made an exhaustive inquiry, and furnished an interim report, but a decision as to whether this disease shall be further propagated as a means of rabbit destruction or not is kept in abeyance until the researches now being made into the rabbit question by the Royal Commission in Australia are made known and future action on their report determined. A copy of the above report by Professor Thomas, and rabbits affected with bladder-fluke, have been sent to the Sydney Commission. I may add that a very wet and cold spring helped without doubt to assist in the decrease of rabbits in the Wairarapa, and the natural enemies of the rabbit in shape of ferrets and cats are reported to be more numerous than hitherto.

With reference to the South Island, in the Marlborough District a new departure was made during the past year, inasmuch as the rabbit country there is now being dealt with by the Awatere Rabbit Board, whose operations began last winter, when an exceedingly good poisoning was effected; but I am led to believe the success was not followed up with proper measures, consequently a large increase of the pest has been reported again to have taken place during the summer on the low-lying country. This Board has expended its funds chiefly in the introduction of stoats and weasels, but I am afraid that, as they have been distributed in small numbers as apportioned, their effect will not be noticeable for some time; and I hear that already a petition is being got up by many of the ratepayers to have the Board dissolved, and I shall not be surprised to find that before another season this department will have again to assume charge of the area now being dealt with by this Board.

Near Blenheim a new phase of the question appears. Here a large and organized system is being carried on for tinning the rabbits in great numbers, some 200 hands are at present employed: a delicate question of administration therefore arises. The country near this preserving factory is low-lying dry country, where the natural enemy has not been a success, thus affording all the surrounding necessities for the rapid increase of the pest. Being near a considerable population satisfactory results will follow if the vigorous work now being carried out in this direction is continuously employed; but the great danger to be feared is that in summer, when the skins are less valuable and the rabbits breeding, therefore not so fit for preserving, will they not be allowed to increase so that more profit may accrue in the winter? Again, will not this system bear heavily upon those properties situated on the margin of this preserving area, and where poisoning and other decisive action is taken? I can see only one equitable solution of the case, which is that where the preserving of rabbits is carried on in this way the owner or owners of such properties should be compelled to thoroughly secure their boundaries with rabbit-proof fencing.

With the exception of this block of country I am informed that if anything a decrease is observable on the higher country and the rabbits well in check.

On the southern boundary of Marlborough the North Amuri and Hurunui Rabbit Boards have been constituted with the object of preventing, by means of rabbit-proof fencing, and introduction of the natural enemy, a further advance of the pest into North Canterbury. The fence extends from the sea some fifty miles inland, traversing in some places very high and rough country. The promoters are sanguine of being able to thus offer a very decided check to the pest's advance. I trust their anticipations may prove correct; and should this fence prove a barrier during the coming winter and spring it will go far towards confirming this as a means of protection. Together with this fencing, a number of the natural enemy have been released on the margin of the pest, and they should materially assist in checking the dreaded advance.

The infested country at Te Akatarawa, north of the Waitaki River, referred to in my last report, is, I regret to say, if anything, even in a worse state. A further spread of the pest has occurred, and it is to be regretted that this corner was not fenced off last year as recommended. The South Canterbury rabbit-fence determined upon last season is now in course of erection. Some thirty miles are in course of erection, and as the remainder of material ordered is now in the colony its completion should not be long deferred. I am glad to be able to report that from all accounts the dreaded influx of rabbits in myriads from the Ohau Gorge has not as yet occurred, and it is to prevent such a contingency that this fence is now being erected. It commences at a point east of the Tasman River, and extends for some twenty-two miles, ending at the east corner of Lake Pukaki. Together with the fence a rabbitier has been specially employed near Birch Hill, on the western side of Tasman River, and over two hundred stoats and weasels turned out near the Hermitage, Pukaki Lake, Ohau and Dobson Gorges, and Naumann Range. Not more than sixty rabbits have been killed by the said rabbitier up to date, and these are reported to have come down the Tasman; and I consider the steps taken by Government during the last two seasons, in releasing the natural enemy as available on the outskirts of the pest, has resulted well. A further line of fencing is being erected from Stony Creek to Hakateramea, over a distance of some fourteen miles, as a part of this fencing scheme, and so affording a barrier of over thirty miles to protect Canterbury