

3. THE EXISTING STATE OF THE TUATARA (*SPHENODON PUNCTATUS* GRAY), WITH SOME NOTES ON ITS HABITS.

(Compiled from reports of Special Protectors and other sources by J. ALLAN THOMSON, Director of the Dominion Museum, Wellington.)

INTRODUCTION.

In 1913, at the instance of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. A. Hamilton, late Director of the Dominion Museum, made a number of inquiries by letter from persons specially qualified to give information about the tuatara and its present distribution. Later in the same year the light-keepers on Stephen Island, The Brothers, and Cuvier Island, and the caretaker of Little Barrier bird sanctuary, were appointed special protectors of the tuatara for those islands, and have in this capacity submitted reports from time to time to the Under-Secretary of Internal Affairs, some of which contain information of general interest. The opinions expressed are somewhat variable on the matter of whether the animals are increasing or decreasing, as may be seen from the remarks tabulated below. Owing to the nocturnal habits of the reptile, the light-keepers are not in all cases in a position to judge of its abundance, as their duties keep them near the lighthouses at night. The special protectors have been instructed to destroy wild cats, hawks, and other enemies of the tuatara, and there is therefore reason to hope that more definite evidence of an increase in numbers may be recorded in a few years.

Writer and Date.	Remarks.
NUMBERS, INCREASE OR DECREASE, AND ENEMIES.	
<i>Stephen Island.</i>	
P. W. Grenfell; 7th April, 1913	Not plentiful between March, 1909, and May, 1911. "The whole number would not exceed 150. During my time they appeared to be holding their own. Prior to then, from information received, I believe they had decreased considerably. The decrease may be taken from the time the island became a light-station (1894), and was owing to the following causes: (1) Keepers in the early days selling the eggs; (2) cats, domestic or wild; (3) kingfishers, who prey upon the young ones. (I believe the last cat was killed a year before I left the island.)"
T. H. Turner; 31st March, 1913	"The lizards were plentiful two years and a half ago, and were then increasing in numbers. The wild cats used to destroy a few, but we shot or trapped most of the cats."
W. A. Dabinett; 23rd April, 1913	"They were very plentiful on Stephen Island the eighteen months I was stationed there, and I do not think they are decreasing in numbers, as I saw no skeletons about."
R. S. Wilson, 5th April, 1913	"I have seen several young lizards lately, but whether they are increasing in their numbers or not I cannot say. But there is one thing I wish to draw your special attention to, and that is their enemies. As far as I can see, the hawk is the most dangerous. Just recently I disturbed a hawk in the act of devouring a half-grown lizard."
D. McNeil; 5th April, 1913	"There are a large number all over the island . . . and this last summer they appear to be on the increase. What lizards we see about are all large ones; we do not see any little ones at all."
R. S. Wilson; 4th June, 1913	"During the month I have disposed of four hawks and two cats. The former are not numerous on the island at present, nor are the cats."
R. S. Wilson; 30th September, 1913	"The tuatara lizard is now over its winter sleep, and can be seen basking in the sun on various parts of the island, but not in any great numbers."
E. W. Tutt; 23rd October, 1913	"After very careful looking about this island, and comparing the number of tuatara lizards with what I saw five years ago, I am quite sure that there are 50 per cent. less than formerly. I cannot make out why I see no young ones, quarter or half grown up. Up to this time I have seen only a few old females with eggs. I find that there are a few cats here yet, but not many."
R. S. Wilson; 3rd January, 1914	"I am firmly of opinion that year by year the tuatara lizards are decreasing in numbers. Up to the present I have seen no young . . . The only reasons I can give are as follows: their natural enemies, hawks, cats, and kingfishers. . . . Cats are increasing, and only recently one of the keepers came across a body of a lizard almost devoured by them. They have a good deal of cover here."
R. S. Wilson; 1st June, 1914	"I firmly believe that their numbers will be on the increase next summer. I am basing my views on the numbers of hawks that have been destroyed; roughly speaking, Mr. Willers and I have altogether destroyed about two hundred, and now one is rarely to be seen."