

The licensed trapper will find it to his interests to discourage by all means in his power the unlicensed man. At present, where nearly all is illegal, no man can adequately protect his own interests against other men.

The owner of opossum-bearing country will be able to reap the advantages he is entitled to. At present there are many settlers who own bush that they will not trap themselves because they will not break the law. They have the constant mortification of knowing that their bush is being poached to the great advantage of other men. The opossum-poacher is sometimes a settler otherwise desirable. Sometimes, however, he is a man who cares for no interests whatever but his own. Such men resent all interference with their unlawful trade, and there are instances of owners who have suffered from the revenge that follows attempts to prevent poaching on their land. Such instances would be very numerous if more of the law-abiding owners were to take vigorous measures of protection.

Instead of a trade that drains the bushes all the year round there would be a trade that would spare the summer, autumn, and spring skins, which are of comparatively small value, though still worth taking. Thus great wastage would be avoided.

The registered dealer would, if trade in New Zealand skins were legalized, be able to take advantage of the high quality of New Zealand skins in general, and of the southern skins in particular, by advertising "best New Zealand skins," instead of having to dispose of New Zealand skins to the local furrier or to export them as Australian skins. The difficulty at present felt is, I understand, so far as the dealer is concerned, not a legal one so much as a moral one, as it is doubtful whether the dealer, not himself a poacher, could be punished for dealing.

The dealers would be assured, during three months, of a supply of skins taken when all were at their best, instead of a supply of skins of a poorer average quality because many of them are taken when at their worst. It is quite certain, in my opinion, that the majority of dealers would prefer a clearly legalized trade and would honestly endeavour to make a success of reasonable regulations tending to secure it. If some were following a legal trade, it would be to the general advantage of the others to do so.

In spite of the advantages summarized above that would follow from legal trapping during an open season, it would probably be too much to expect that the buying of skins taken in the close season would altogether cease, or poaching be altogether abandoned. Regulations can only regulate within the limits which human nature sets, and unless the machinery for enforcement is quite adequate some men will always follow natural instincts towards an illegal gain, or will yield to a perverted spirit of adventure. The aim should be reduction of illegal action to a minimum that shall constantly dwindle. I make these remarks because I have met several very intelligent men who, in discussing the question of poaching, object to every proposal that is brought forward, basing the objection on the impossibility of eliminating poaching. The present position they admit to be as bad as it can be, but they do not approve of any change unless that change would be entirely free from evil. Such a change neither they nor I have yet been able to propose, and I propose the scheme that seems to me, after consideration with shrewd men that have expert knowledge, open to the least objection.

Rangers should advise as soon as possible after an open season has come to an end as to how far the bushes have been depleted, and as to whether an open season should be declared in the following year. Public notice should be given not later than January of each year as to whether an open season will be declared or not in any particular district. As a rule it will be found advisable, if circumstances warrant it, to have an open season declared for at least all the districts of the South or of the North Island at one time.

*Licensing Trappers; Kind of Traps to be used.*—Regulations as to trapping should provide that after a fixed date—say, 1922—no rabbit-traps shall be used for the taking of opossums, seeing that these frequently break the animal's leg and involve quite needless cruelty. The regulation trap should be the American jump trap, which is much less severe in its action and is perfectly safe. It has the advantage to the trapper that it is lighter. The only other method of taking opossums that should be open to a licensed trapper is by means of the snare, largely used in parts of Australia and by poachers in some parts of New Zealand. In the notes written by Mr. Ostler and appended to this report there is an adequate description of this device.

In a district other than a fruit district no person, whether on his own property or not, should kill an opossum except during a declared open season, nor should he then kill without a license. Further, the license should be held by the man who kills. A license should not entitle the possessor to engage an unlicensed person to kill. A license should give no right of entry upon private property or upon Crown lands. A property-owner might, without having a license, empower a licensed trapper to trap his property, but he should at once report to the nearest post-office that he has done so, giving the name of the trapper and the number of the license, of the validity of which he should have taken all reasonable steps to assure himself. Any unlicensed trapper who secures such permission from an owner shall be liable to a minimum penalty of £5, in addition to a penalty of £2 for each skin taken. The skins should become the property of the Crown. Default in payment of the fine should involve a serious term of imprisonment.

Within fifteen days after an open season has come to an end a licensed trapper should have disposed of his skins to a registered dealer, or should have produced them to be marked and recorded by any officer in the district appointed by the Crown to do so. A license fee of £1 should be paid before the issue of the license. I suggest that the amount of these fees should be handed over to the acclimatization societies to secure a larger amount of ranging.

Licenses should be issued by the Minister of Internal Affairs, who might empower police officers or other officers to be gazetted to issue licenses on his behalf.

I make with less confidence a suggestion that owners of opossum-bearing property who under license trap their property or have it trapped should pay to the Crown a royalty of 1s. for each skin taken. My hesitation in making this recommendation is not due to any doubt as to its equity, of