

Wellington.—Though reduced in numbers in most districts and well in hand in some parts, rabbits are still much too plentiful in many parts of the district, though the work of their destruction has been vigorously pressed by Inspectors, and much more rabbit-extermination work (poisoning, &c.) than usual has been done in nearly all districts where rabbits exist. Gisborne, Wairoa, and Hawke's Bay districts are under the administration of the East Coast and Hawke's Bay Rabbit Boards, and good work has been done by both Boards in keeping the pest in check. The cost of rabbiting Crown and Native lands within their respective districts has also been undertaken by these Boards, and the cost of this work charged to this Department has been heavy. The principal method adopted by settlers for the destruction of rabbits is poisoning, the principal poison used being phosphorized pollard. During last year, however, owing to the very high price of skins, a good deal of trapping has taken place. This is a matter for regret, as the pest can much more efficiently be dealt with by systematic poisoning, fumigation of burrows, &c. Where rabbits have a high market value and trapping is resorted to the curse of rabbit-farming is almost inevitable. During the year 70,133 lb. of phosphorized-pollard rabbit poison was manufactured at the Masterton depot and sold to settlers, as against 42,259 lb. made and sold the previous year.

Auckland.—A steady fight was carried on against the pest right through the winter, with very good results, and at the end of winter it was considered that the number of rabbits was considerably less in all localities than had been the case for several years past. Unfortunately, however, the climatic conditions during the spring and summer seasons proved most favourable to their increase, particularly owing to the absence of spring floods, which can usually be relied upon to drown a large percentage of the early litters, which are those that matter most. The climatic conditions which had been so favourable to the rabbits during the summer, and would also have been favourable to their destruction by poison later, altered during February—about the time it was intended to commence the first general poisoning. The rains which have been experienced at regular intervals since have interfered considerably with poisoning operations, due both to the flush of young grass and to a great deal of poison being destroyed by rain after laying. Every effort is being made by officers to organize settlers in the different localities in their districts into committees and boards to enable the work of rabbit-destruction to be carried out systematically, and in most cases settlers are responding readily. The organization for fighting the pest in this district is now better than at any time in the past, and notwithstanding the unfavourable conditions during the past year the pest has been considerably reduced in all parts. During the year approximately 156,043 lb. of phosphorized pollard has been prepared and despatched from the Department's poison-mixing depot at Frankton Junction, as against 124,559 lb. for the year ended 31st March, 1919, and 64,880 lb. for the year ended 31st March, 1918. No difficulty has been experienced in filling all orders promptly. We also disposed of 170 oz. of strychnine and 10,000 lb. of carbon bisulphide.

NOXIOUS WEEDS.

In connection with the administration of the Noxious Weeds Act a steady request for the appointment of additional Inspectors has been received from local bodies and others, but I am of opinion that this is unnecessary if a more strict application of the provisions of the Act is carried out by the Department's officers by reducing the number of warnings given obvious defaulters, thereby enabling the Inspectors to cover more ground, instead of having to make repeated inspections to see if previous warnings have been complied with.

It is a matter for consideration whether the time has not come for an amendment to the Act by leaving blackberry alone in the Second Schedule and giving local bodies an option regarding other weeds, but with provision for the protection of the interests of adjoining local bodies through the officers of the Department retaining their powers under the Act, to enable them to enforce uniformity as between the occupiers of land in adjoining districts. Provision should also be made for road-lines to be kept cleared by the local authority, and not by the adjoining owners as at present. The administration of the Act as it at present stands has been carried out with increased energy, especially in districts where too great headway has not yet been made by a particular weed. But the application of the provisions of the Act in so far as some districts are concerned presents many difficulties, and the position will become increasingly worse as time goes on unless uniform action on the part of settlers is undertaken throughout the whole of these districts.

DAIRY DIVISION.

REPORT OF THE DIVISIONAL DIRECTOR.

The Director-General.

Wellington, 28th May, 1920.

I SUBMIT herewith the annual report of the Dairy Division for the year ended 31st March, 1920, and desire to acknowledge the help and co-operation of Mr. W. M. Singleton, Assistant Director, in connection with the supervision and control of the divisional work during the year.

D. CUDDIE, Director.

THE SEASON.

Owing to the climatic conditions prevailing it cannot be said that the 1919-20 dairying season has been altogether a favourable one for the producers of the Dominion. The autumn was unusually dry, and feed for cattle became abnormally scarce in the principal dairying districts, with the result that the quantity of dairy-produce manufactured at that time did not reach the ordinary level. When it came to the colder months of the year many of the dairy herds suffered severely. The late spring, accompanied by a continual low atmospheric temperature, accentuated the shortage of feed, and consequently many of the cows were in a low condition at the opening of the season, owing to the want of proper nourishment. For this reason there was a heavy mortality amongst the cattle, more particularly in the North of Auckland district, and the financial loss entailed proved a serious item to the settlers concerned. The early summer months gave promise of a return to a normal state of things, but this was not fully realized, and the outlook in November and December was far from reassuring from the dairy farmers' point of view, owing to the absence of sufficient rainfall. The milk-supply at factories generally showed a rapid decrease in quantity, but fortunately the position was relieved during the month of January, when much-needed rain fell, resulting in a great improvement in the pasture. Feed for stock soon became abundant, and was followed by a marked increase in the volume of milk and cream received at the factories. From then onwards a better season was assured, and although the previous shrinkage in the production has not been fully made up, the season has proved more profitable than was formerly expected.