

GRAZING.

Investigations finalized during the year have proved that grazing is progressively injurious to the forest according to its intensity and duration. The Service on that account has now adopted the policy of discouraging such, and as demarcation and dedication for forestry clearly defines the areas grazing will be eliminated from all but open land so dedicated. A thorough accounting has now been made of grazing-values on lands controlled by the Service, and during the year under review the revenue derived from this source only amounted to £2,735.

OPOSSUMS.

A comprehensive investigation into the life and history and economic position of the opossum in its relation to forestry and other interests was commenced during the year, but owing to pressure of other work this had to be discontinued before many phases of the investigation could be studied to definite conclusions. An interim report covering the investigation was prepared and circulated, and as opportunity offers further investigations will be made, and tentative conclusions arrived at in that report will be finalized. The trapping season 1924 shows a falling-off in the number of opossums trapped: 95,639 skins were taken, as against 109,905 the previous season. In some forests, previously the best trapping-grounds, results were so poor that many trappers abandoned their areas. This confirms previous statements issued by the Service that the opossum is easily kept down, and will never become a menace. It is estimated that 70 per cent. of the opossums trapped during the season were taken from State forests. The share of licenses and royalties credited to the State Forests Account was £2,784 12s. 2d.

RECREATIONAL USES OF THE FORESTS.

As the development of the Dominion creates better access a greater interest in the incomparable beauties of our forests, and the opportunity which they provide for health-giving recreation, is evidenced by tourists, trappers, fishermen, shootists, and the general public. Appreciation of the policy of the Service in adopting an open-door attitude in regard to reasoned and careful recreational use of State forests, the policy of preserving areas of scenic beauty by their elimination from milling-areas and protection from fire, the provision of camping-sites and fireplaces as finance permits, is shown in the remarks of the yearly increasing number of pleasure and health seekers resorting to the forests. It is now proposed to place permanent forest-users upon a better footing by granting permanent camping and hut-building sites upon the payment of a nominal sum.

NATIVE BIRD-LIFE.

It is pleasing to note that reports from every region throughout the Dominion denote in most cases an increase in the native avifauna. This state of affairs has without doubt been largely brought about through the efforts of that active body "The New Zealand Native Birds Protection Society," whose work and propaganda has reached all corners of the Dominion and created a feeling towards the preservation of our native birds which has previously been remarkable by its absence. The Service, realizing the value of and the relation of bird-life to the forest, gives its whole-hearted support to this society, and officers use every opportunity to stress the need for perpetuating our native birds.

HONORARY FOREST RANGERS.

Ten additional honorary forest rangers were appointed, bringing the total strength of this volunteer force to sixty-six.

The State Forest Service again wishes to go on record as acknowledging its deep appreciation to this body of honorary guards of the national forest domain. Most substantial assistance was rendered during the year by this corps of honorary officers throughout the Dominion in aiding in the protection of the forests against fire, the suppression of vandalism, and in the general conservation of the forests and the wild life contained therein. The splendid co-operation that is being secured in extending the forestry movement throughout the Dominion is very much worth while.

FOREST-PROTECTION.

In forest-fire prevention another record has been set up, due largely to loyal public co-operation and to the creation and operation of fire districts. The fire season, with the exception of Southland, was not a season of high hazard. The Service made its greatest losses in point of land burned over in the Auckland, Wellington, Westland, and Southland regions, where land to the extent of 1,927 acres was traversed by fire. Of this total, 126 acres carried valuable milling-timber. The total number of fires on State forests was twelve, as compared with thirty-three in the previous year. The monetary loss was only £61.

OFFENCES UNDER THE FORESTS ACT AND REGULATIONS.

There were four prosecutions during the year against offenders, convictions being secured in each case. For kauri-gum stealing one offender was sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labour, two others were fined, and a fourth fined and put on probation for two years. One offender was fined for committing a fire offence. Several cases of over-cutting of timber were detected and were appropriately dealt with.

WILD PIGS.

During the year an extended effort by the Departments of Agriculture, Lands, and the Forest Service, organized and controlled by the latter, was made to control the wild-pig nuisance in the hinterland of Taranaki. Up to the end of the year nearly ten thousand pigs were destroyed, a reduction in numbers which must prove of inestimable benefit to settlers residing in the area where operations were undertaken.