

RABBIT NUISANCE.

Efforts towards the destruction of rabbits have been waged with unabated energy, but notwithstanding all the efforts put forth and the seemingly satisfactory position attained at the end of winter, the young rabbits again quickly show themselves, and the fight continues as an ever-recurring struggle. In spite, however, of the difficulties encountered we are able to report a considerable reduction in the pest as compared with the previous year. The very wet, cold season during the spring and early summer assisted considerably in the attainment of this, particularly in the Otago-Southland district, by drowning large numbers of young rabbits. Apart from this, however, the winter and spring months were not suitable for rabbit-destruction by means of poison, and very energetic measures had to be taken during the summer and autumn months to keep the rabbits in check.

Rabbit Boards continue, with few exceptions, to do admirable work, and the condition of the pest in the North Island, where considerable areas are now controlled by Boards, continues to be satisfactory, demonstrating that rabbits can be effectively controlled when the co-operative spirit is dominant.

Following are extracts from the reports of the District Superintendents at Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland respectively in regard to the condition of their respective districts:—

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT, DUNEDIN.

Although the 1925 season may show an increase in the export of skins this was to be expected. The pest was recognized to be decidedly numerous throughout Otago and Southland for that year, and an increase was admitted. I am pleased to be able to report that there has apparently been a decided improvement right throughout the season, although I do not claim that this has been brought about by the nature or amount of work done. On the contrary, it is solely owing to the abnormal wet, cold season (spring and summer principally) that thousands of young rabbits were drowned. As a matter of fact a great deal less pollard poisoning appears to have been done, as the Department records for the year show a falling-off in sales of 37,736 lb., and a 1,000 lb. increase on phosphorized-oats sales, and an increase of only 867 oz. of strychnine. No doubt a great deal more of the latter commodity would have been disposed of had our supplies not become exhausted at the time of the year when most in demand. On the other hand, this was met by outside vendors of strychnine at slightly advanced rates in most instances, therefore the position did not affect results generally.

For effective fumigating results, especially in large warrens, in my opinion, nothing equals the smoke fumigator, and there are now three makers of these machines operating in Otago and Southland. All makes give excellent results if properly handled, while the cost of smoking-material is very small.

The adjournment of rabbit prosecutions by certain Magistrates and the smallness of the fines generally is still proving detrimental to good work.

There is nothing fresh to report so far as the methods of control are concerned. The same position applies. Many landowners will not pay for spring and summer work, and they merely mark time until the professional rabbiters come along in the autumn, who in turn do just sufficient to hold their block for winter-skin high prices.

The Rabbit Boards, four in number, show little or no improvement generally over previous years' operations.

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT, CHRISTCHURCH.

The climatic conditions during last winter were the worst experienced for many years. Wet weather set in about the end of April and continued right throughout the winter and spring, making successful poisonings practically impossible. During the previous winter, owing to the exceptionally favourable conditions, settlers were enabled to go over the ground a second and in some cases a third time. During last winter they had the greatest difficulty in getting over the ground once. Large gangs had to stand by idle for weeks on end, and enormous quantities of poison were completely spoilt. So although farmers, and especially large runholders, expended large sums of money results were unsatisfactory. As a consequence Inspectors had to urge owners to carry on destruction work right through the summer and autumn. I am pleased to state that with the exception of those who are in extreme financial difficulties settlers complied exceedingly well with the Inspectors notices and requests. I am also pleased to report that with the exception of a few isolated areas the district reports indicate a reduction in the number of rabbits as compared with last year. This is no doubt due to the energetic steps taken early this autumn—the weather being favourable, large areas were poisoned early in March.

Strychnine and carrots and strychnine and oats are now the principal means adopted during the winter and early spring months. Phosphorized pollard was used extensively in some districts early in the autumn, but, unfortunately, the results were more or less of a failure, with the exception of a few areas where rabbits had not been disturbed during the summer. During the summer trapping, dogging, shooting, and digging out of burrows and stops were the chief methods of destruction adopted. In the Kaikoura and Rotherham districts fumigating with either carbon bisulphide or calcium cyanide has been resorted to on a fairly extensive scale with very satisfactory results. As a consequence I fully expect to see these methods carried out on a much larger scale next season. A considerable amount of trapping is still being carried out in localities adjacent to the railways—the carcasses being sent to Christchurch and other towns for retail in shops. Inspectors report, however, that this season the catches are very small. The natural enemy seems to be on the increase—ferrets especially are increasing rapidly in North Canterbury and Kaikoura.

During the year approximately 42,500 lb. of phosphorized pollard and over 2,000 oz. of strychnine were distributed from the Department's depots.

All Inspectors have made special efforts to get the settlers to take united action towards keeping the pest in check during the breeding season, and I am pleased to be able to state that farmers generally are taking a keener interest in the rabbit-pest question and are now more inclined to co-operate with the Department in this matter.

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT, WELLINGTON.

There are now 20 Rabbit Boards constituted in this district, 4 under Part II and 16 under Part III of the Act. Three of the Boards have only recently been constituted and have yet to prove their worth, but the remaining 17 have, almost without exception, shown a substantial reduction in the numbers of the pest during the course of the year in the areas under their control. One Board in particular has had a particularly hard row to hoe, and the results in its case are not so pronounced as could be wished for, but there is no cause for worry, as it is expected that much better results will be shown before long.

Rabbits throughout the district, including areas administered by this Department and by Rabbit Boards, are decidedly on the decrease, as good work has been done throughout the year. The principal means of destruction have been systematic poisoning, fumigation of burrows, digging of holes and warrens, and in some localities trapping. The latter method is not favoured by the departmental officers, but cannot be put a stop to, unfortunately. Rabbiters using this method of destruction usually leave a large percentage of the rabbits uncaught, and these quickly produce a plentiful supply to fill the place of those trapped.