

RABBIT NUISANCE.

The unremitting efforts which have been waged against the rabbit pest since this Division took over the work in 1919 and so organized its staff as to allow of the most effective work possible being concentrated on the administration of the provisions of the Rabbit Nuisance Act have given good results. This year has shown such an improved position in regard to the reduction of the pest that the hope of reducing the pest to a minimum shows greater promise of fulfilment than ever before in the history of the rabbit pest in New Zealand. An improved position is reported from all over the Dominion, and although there are still some isolated cases where the improvement is not quite so satisfactory, particularly in the most southern part of the South Island, the decrease is, on the whole, most marked. The North Island is to-day in a most favourable position in regard to the pest. Knowing the almost unanimous feeling that exists in the desire to push the rabbit right out, I feel satisfied that the present improved position can be more than maintained.

The Rabbit Boards have continued to do good work, and are to be congratulated on the results of their operations. A keen interest has been manifest throughout and the co-operation which has taken place between the members of the Boards and the Department and its Inspectors has been a satisfactory feature of their operations and has contributed largely to the success achieved.

During the year sales of strychnine amounted to 13,758 oz. This poison is rapidly taking the place of phosphorized pollard.

Amendments to the Rabbit Nuisance Act are necessary, particularly to those parts of the Act pertaining to the respective Boards, and I trust that it will be found expedient to have these amendments brought forward for consideration by Parliament during the coming session. The necessity to bring down amendments in order that various anomalies might be removed, particularly in respect to the machinery clauses of the Act, has been recognized for some time, and Rabbit Boards have pressed for them. A measure consolidating the Rabbit Nuisance Act and containing the amendments now required has been practically completed, and as the principal amendments pertain to what might be called the machinery clauses of Parts II, III, and IV of the existing Act relating to Rabbit Boards, as asked for by the Boards' representatives, they are recommended for early consideration.

I append hereto the following 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.

It is gratifying to be able to report a decided decrease in the state of the rabbit pest, although Southland inspectorates have not shown an improvement as compared with the Otago portion of the district. This, to my mind, is accounted for by more trapping in the former and less trapping and more poisoning in the latter. Canning and freezing of the rabbit is going on in Southland, while very little of this is heard of in Otago. Some of the pastoral country in Otago that was a few years ago literally swarming with rabbits is now in a very creditable condition. The pest has been reduced to a minimum, there is feed in abundance, more sheep are being carried, whilst both the wool-clip and the lambing percentages have increased. There are, however, always the dilatory landowners who do little or nothing towards control during spring and summer.

There is no doubt about the wet spring and summer of 1926 following somewhat similar conditions of 1925, assisted by the more general use of strychnine with carrots and apples in winter, strychnine and oats in summer, together with considerably less trapping, whereby the natural enemy increased and did good work, was responsible in a marked degree for the satisfactory improvement manifested. The cutting-down and in some cases the total eradication of overgrown gorse hedges which had not been dealt with for many years has also made an apparent difference.

Fumigation with either the smoke (the king of all in large warrens), carbon-bisulphide, or calcium-cyanide fumigators, where well carried out, are all giving good service. An improved light calcium-cyanide blower, known as the "Feeny pump," has been invented and manufactured in New Zealand. This was put on the market this season at £4 10s., and, I understand, a large number have been sold. These little machines are more durable and cheaper than the Buzacott blowers.

Owing to the improved state of the pest, prosecutions this season have been fewer.

A decrease in phosphorized-pollard sales took place during the year by 42,725 lb., and as last year's sales of this commodity were below 1924-25 by 37,736 lb. a total decrease of 80,461 lb. has occurred in two years. Our output for the current year was only 52,937 lb. Probably the abnormally wet spring and summer reduced the output considerably. Nevertheless, strychnine is gradually becoming more popular, and although our sales of this dropped from 7,484 oz. in 1925-26 to 6,510 oz. in 1926-27 our supplies were exhausted at the season when most in demand. Private vendors, however, came to the rescue, and were able to supply all that was required.

Rabbit Boards.—The Rabbit Boards remain as before, four in number, and these show an improvement on present years' operations.

Hereunder is a summary of rabbit-poison and material sold to the public, used on Crown lands, Native lands, and railway-lines, together with a comparison to the previous year :—

Article.	Sold.		Crown Lands.		Railway-lines.		Native Lands.	
	1925-26.	1926-27.	1925-26.	1926-27.	1925-26.	1926-27.	1925-26.	1926-27.
Phosphorized pollard (pounds)	95,662	52,937	2,965	2,390	3,875	3,107	179	144
Phosphorized oats (pounds) ..	3,532	2,861	88	200	191	141	6	31
Bisulphide (pounds)	..	26	530	497	672½	812	20½	8
Phosphorus (pounds)	172	69	..	..	..	..	..	..
Strychnine (ounces)	7,484	6,510	21	36	..	..	..	2
Cartridges (number)	..	..	1,017	740	..	..	..	..

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT, CHRISTCHURCH.

Weather conditions during last winter were exceptionally mild, thus enabling settlers to carry out the work of rabbit-destruction right through the winter and spring. This was especially fortunate for back-country runholders—a marked contrast with the previous winter, when so much energy and material was wasted by adverse weather conditions. On the other hand, on account of the mild winter, rabbits commenced breeding much earlier than usual—in fact, in some localities adjacent to the seaboard they bred right throughout the winter. As a result settlers had