

The number of rabbit-skins exported for the twelve months ending December, 1927, was 12,928,669, valued at £682,658, as against 20,444,390, valued at £740,975, for the twelve months ending December, 1924.

A consolidation of the Rabbit Nuisance Act, with certain amendments, principally of a machinery nature, and pertaining more especially to the provisions relating to the formation and administration of Rabbit Boards, has been prepared, and its passage through Parliament is urgently desired.

I append hereto the following reports from the officers responsible for the administration of the Rabbit Nuisance Act in the districts of Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury-West Coast, and Otago-Southland respectively :—

AUCKLAND DISTRICT.

The past season has been most favourable to the increase of the pest. Owing to the absence of heavy rains there were very few casualties in the earlier litters, which quickly matured and entered on the cycle of reproduction. The effect of this became apparent early in the season, when numbers of young rabbits began to show up in districts where previously they have been very scarce. It was readily recognized by our Inspectors and, I am glad to say, by many of the settlers that a special effort was necessary to meet the exceptionally favourable conditions and to hold the pest in check. As the season advanced it became increasingly noticeable that in those districts where the settlers had previously experienced the danger of a rabbit-invasion the increase was less noticeable than in districts where hitherto they had been scarce, and where the majority of settlers nursed the delusion that for various imaginary reasons they would not increase on *their* country. The most glaring example of this was observed in the Northern Peninsula (portions of Whangarei and Hobson County) where the pest has made very definite headway, and where a number of properties were found to be badly infested. An extensive block of unindividualized Native land in Moengawahine Valley—approximately 10,000 acres—was also found to be badly infested. This block has now been closely poisoned by a gang employed by Inspector McKinlay, who reports that the results obtained from the use of phosphorized pollard have been excellent. A very close supervision will be necessary in the districts mentioned to prevent the further spread and permanent establishment of the pest.

A very definite increase also took place in Raglan County, due very largely to the exceptionally favourable season and the fact that supervision had been temporarily relaxed owing to the transfer of the Assistant Inspector. In Waikato, King-country, and Rotorua districts, where the settlers were more alive to the danger, the increase has been less noticeable, and, generally speaking, a determined effort is being made to reduce the pest to the lowest possible minimum during the winter months. The Rabbit Boards operating in this district continue to do excellent work.

The extensive areas of Crown and Native lands worked by our Department are in good order, there being practically no increase in the number of rabbits, notwithstanding the favourable season. Three blocks of Crown land, approximately 65,000 acres, situated in the East Coast Rabbit Board's district and previously worked by that Board, is now being poisoned by our gang. These blocks, which are badly infested, it is considered can be worked by our men more economically than by the Board's rabbiters. Owing to the continuance of very hot weather the general poisoning commenced a month later than usual. A heavy demand set in for supplies of phosphorized pollard during February and March.

Sales from the Frankton poison-depot for the year ending 31st March, 1928, show a slight decrease in phosphorized pollard and carbon bisulphide, and a decided decrease in strychnine, as represented by the following comparative table :—

Pollard poison on hand, 1st April, 1927	..	..	..	..	..	..	21,621
Manufactured to 31st March, 1928	..	..	..	..	..	..	45,141
Total	..	..	..	..	..	..	66,762
Despatched from depot to 31st March, 1928	..	..	..	..	..	..	55,496
Manufactured pollard poison on hand, 1st April, 1928	..	..	..	..	..	..	11,266
Total	..	..	..	..	..	..	66,762
Sales—							
						1927.	1928.
Pollard poison	..	..	..	..	..	49,423 lb.	55,496 lb.
Strychnine	..	..	..	..	..	1,988 „	1,319 oz.
Carbon bisulphide	..	..	..	..	..	379 gal.	958 gal.

The decrease in sales of strychnine is probably due to the fact that the prolonged summer weather has retarded development of winter fur, and the fur-hunters have consequently delayed operations to a later date than in previous years.

WELLINGTON DISTRICT.

Since my last report another decided decrease in the numbers of the pest has taken place, and I am pleased to be able to report that, with a very few isolated exceptions, owners are energetically pursuing the work of rabbit-destruction with a view to so reducing their numbers that the natural enemy will gain the balance of power and keep the pest well in check without human aid.

Rabbit Boards in this district still continue to justify their existence, all having done excellent work, and in most cases now have the pest reduced to an easily controlled minimum. It is pleasing to note that settlers throughout the areas of the several Boards where the rabbiting-work is done by land-occupiers under the superintendence of the Board's Inspectors are carrying out the necessary control and eradication work with a minimum of friction between the Board's officers and themselves. A number of the Boards do not employ an inspection staff, but carry out the rabbiting-work with the Board's men under the charge of a foreman rabbitier, and in these cases there is no friction with the settlers as each settler acts as an inspector in respect to his own property, and possibly of other holdings as well, and reports to the Board the presence of rabbits, with a request that they be dealt with, and all such reports are immediately attended to by the Board's staff.

In those areas in which the Rabbit Act is directly administered by this Department's Inspectors rabbits are very well in hand also. Odd rabbits have been located in places in Taranaki, and energetic steps were immediately taken to have them eradicated.

CANTERBURY—WEST COAST DISTRICT.

I have very much pleasure in reporting that the pest continues to show a very satisfactory improvement throughout the whole of my district, all Inspectors reporting a marked decrease as compared with last year. Weather conditions during the winter were very favourable for poisoning operations, with the exception of about three weeks in May last, when a large area of the high country was under snow, accompanied by very severe frosts, the rabbit-suppression work being consequently delayed for the period in that part of the district. However, the remaining portion of the winter and spring was exceptionally mild, enabling the settlers to poison the country very thoroughly. They also in many cases were able to go over the work a second time. Good work was also done during the summer and autumn months, with excellent results. Strychnine, and