

DEER.

Departmental Party Operations.

As the result of departmental party operations, a total of 19,145 deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and 6 chamois (*Rupicapra tragus*) were killed, and 10,182 skins recovered during the period 1st June, 1935, to 31st March, 1936.

It is also possible to fairly accurately forecast the final total results which will be obtained for the whole season, ending at 31st May, 1936, though the services of the majority of the men will be terminated early that month. It is estimated that these totals will reach approximately 23,500 deer killed and 11,500 skins recovered.

Details of the operations in the various localities are as follows:—

Marlborough.—It having been found in previous years that winter operations could be very effectively conducted in certain valleys in Marlborough, this policy was again pursued with marked success. Advantage was taken of the seasonal “drift” of deer from their remote summer habitat into these sheltered valleys, where a high percentage of the deer population could be killed and almost all skins recovered.

A total of 896 deer were killed and 800 skins recovered by a party of three men operating during the months of July, August, and September, 1935.

Otago-South Canterbury.—The season proper, which commenced on 11th November, 1935, was devoted entirely to what has for many years been one of the main strongholds of red deer in New Zealand, the main divide of the Southern Alps, from Mount Aspiring to the vicinity of Mount Cook, including on the eastern side, the whole of the water-sheds of Lakes Wanaka, Hawea, and Ohau, and the Ahuriri and Lindis Rivers and, on the western side, the whole of the water-sheds of the Turnbull, Okuru, and Haast Rivers, and the head basins of the Moeraki, Paringa, Otoko, and Mahitahi Rivers.

Operations had been conducted in almost all parts of this area during previous seasons, but financial limitations imposed had precluded the possibility of operating simultaneously in all parts of the area.

It had long been apparent that, to produce the highest possible degree of success, deer-destruction tactics must provide for operations in an area of this nature to be on a sufficiently comprehensive scale to permit of parties operating in all valleys at the same time between which the deer might pass when disturbed.

Increased funds having been made available, this principle was put into operation, with the marked success indicated by the results obtained. It is significant that, although deer were, at the beginning of the season, considerably less numerous than at the beginning of the previous operations, greater numbers were killed.

In South Westland, each of two seasons' previous operations resulted in less than five thousand being killed, while this season's forecasted total will reach approximately six thousand five hundred.

Operations conducted in the Lake Hawea water-shed five seasons earlier resulted in 5,061 deer being killed, while this season's total will reach approximately five thousand seven hundred.

A very pleasing feature of the season's work is the knowledge that, although marked progress had been made even by the small-scale operations of previous years, such big “kills” were obtained this season and such a high percentage of the previously surviving deer population has now been accounted for.

In some portions of the area the country was almost entirely freed of deer, and over the whole area the deer have been reduced to such numbers that their future control and the cessation of spread is fully possible.

There was noted further evidence that, as previously observed, many scattered deer had returned to their original “home forests,” thus not only checking spread but actually extending the benefit of the operations beyond the areas worked.

It is also gratifying to be able to report that, in several localities, a definite, though slight, improvement in the state of the forests was noted.

In view of this fact, there is ample reason to believe that, although the forest in some areas has suffered damage from which it will never recover, most of it can be saved if the present policy be vigorously pursued and future vigilance maintained.

A striking feature of this season's operations is the fact that, although they embraced the most remote and mountainous country in New Zealand, the skins of over 50 per cent. of the deer killed were recovered, and the net cost of the undertaking has been materially reduced thereby.

The run-holders in the area were, without exception, most helpful and enthusiastic over the results obtained. They were unanimous in expressing their approval of the comprehensive scale of the operations as they realized that deer which had temporarily escaped to neighbouring valleys would not survive to return later as was the case with the fast small-scale operations.

Personnel of Parties.—Considerable difficulty was experienced in keeping the parties up to strength and, although plenty of inexperienced men were available, it was not possible to obtain sufficient men with the necessary experience or of the type capable of attaining to the standard required.

The generally improved tone of the labour market resulted in suitable men, who would otherwise have been available, engaging in more congenial, and in some cases, better-paid occupations.

The necessity for engaging a considerable number of comparatively inexperienced men increased the difficulties of the officer in charge and the head men and area supervisors, and great credit is due to them for the manner in which they trained these men and so directed their activities as to produce such splendid results. A pleasing feature of the season's work is the enthusiasm and energy displayed by the more capable men, who appeared to be inspired by the success of the operations to even greater efforts. In previous years many unsuccessful attempts have been made by members of departmental parties to bring their season's individual tally up to one thousand, but this season five men have reached this mark, while one has exceeded one thousand two hundred.