

Importations.—Many applications were received for the importation of birds, principally for aviaries. Each application is subject to close scrutiny, and where permission is granted conditions are imposed as to examination of the birds at the port of departure and on arrival in the Dominion to obviate the possibility of introducing bird-disease. The ban on the introduction of parrots and members of the parrot family is still operating, and there is also a lengthy list of birds for which permission for importation is not granted.

Opossums.—Open trapping-seasons were declared in twenty-one acclimatization districts. The number of skins stamped was 206,112.

Field Investigations.—Officers of the Department have, in conjunction with duties connected with deer-destruction operations, carried out various investigations. In addition, two officers—Messrs. R. Kean and F. L. Newcombe—made an inspection of a portion of the Ruahine Range, and the following is taken from the very interesting report furnished.

ROUTE.

The country covered by this account we traversed on a three-day trip, McCulloch's Mill, Whakarara, being left on the morning of the 7th February. We followed up the Waipawa River and crossed the Waipawa Saddle at its head to the Waikamara Stream on the west. Our route from here lay across the next ridge to the Kawhatau Stream, along which we travelled nearly to its head. This stream we left by way of Tussock Creek, reaching the crest of the main range about noon on the second day. The range was followed to Rangī-o-te-Atua, whence we made a descent into the Waikamara Stream, down which we travelled to a point some miles below its junction with the Maropea Stream. The volume of water had been increasing steadily, so we climbed out over the Mokai-Patea Plateau on the west, reaching Taoroa Settlement on the Rangitikei some two hours later.

TOPOGRAPHY.

A distinct topographical resemblance to the Tararua Ranges was evident in all the country viewed, and a clear "Alpine" effect was also noticeable in the scenery, due, no doubt, to the numerous slips and talus slopes, with the consequent acutely sharpened peaks and pinnacles. The rocks show the same general characteristics as those of the Tararuas, being for the most part greywackes, but they appear to be more shattered. It is probable that this is due only to their crumbling nature being made more evident by the greater area of bare rock and scree. Parts of the range have an altitude approximately 500 ft. higher than the general level of the Tararuas, and these parts therefore carry a sparser cover of vegetation, while the greater distance between scrub-level and the crest of the range greatly increases the possibility of slipping.

The rivers which drain the western side of the range—the Rangitikei, the Pohangina, and the Oroua—are noted for the deep gorges cut in the lower portions of their courses. There, downcutting is probably progressing but slowly, for this process would be, at first, rapid in the relatively soft sedimentary rocks of that region. On base-level being approached, however, further deepening of their beds would be retarded. In their higher reaches, where more resistant rock and country of greater relief occurs, it would be reasonable to expect downcutting to be less advanced and so to be still continuing at a relatively rapid rate.

The only westward draining river traversed for any distance was the Waikamara, which drains into the Rangitikei, and, from within a few miles of the divide, it flows, by a series of short "S" turns, in a gorge continuous throughout except for occasional small bush-flats. Evidence of rapid downward corrosion is supplied by the small amount of shingle in the bed, the water in some places flowing over bare, newly eroded rock. The walls of the gorge rise very steeply for the most part, and slips, due to undercutting, occur commonly on the bends, most noticeably in the lower portion of the course, and it is important that vegetation be allowed to regenerate on these parts. On some vertical rock cliffs plant covering showed signs of damage, due to material falling from above. This seems to be a recent development, due to disturbance of the steep, unstable higher slopes.

ACCESS.

Eastern Side.—A road extends for thirty miles beyond Waipawa to the Whakarara district, ceasing shortly after McCulloch's Mill—situated on a branch of the Waipawa River—is reached. Easy going up this stream brings one in two hours and a half to the Waipawa Saddle (4,353 ft.), dividing the Waipawa from the Waikamara Stream, which is a tributary of the Rangitikei. Packhorses could be easily taken to and over this saddle, but for no distance down this or the adjoining Kawhatau River.

Western Side.—A road from Taihape, twenty miles, or Utiku, seventeen miles, leads to the Taoroa district, some distance up the Rangitikei River. From the end of the road packhorses can be taken on to the Mokai-Patea ridge, which is a naturally clear ridge and is situated on the south side of the Waikamara Stream. This cleared portion, called the Mokai-Patea Plateau, extends to within roughly five miles of the Main Range, of which the Mokai-Patea ridge is a spur leading up to the highest point of the range, Rangī-o-te-Atua, 5,589 ft. It is most likely that packhorses could be taken right up to where the bush comes onto the ridge again. We did not travel along this ridge, but the Waikamara Stream is definitely of no use as a means of access, as a slight fresh would render it impassable. It took some twelve hours and a half actual travelling-time to reach the end of the road at Taoroa from the main range.

BIRD-LIFE.

It is not surprising when it is considered that the country traversed would be mostly above an elevation of 2,500 ft. to 3,000 ft. that variety of bird-life was lacking. An odd tui, grey warbler, and morepork were heard near our camp in the Kawhatau; a tomtit was also noticed here, while farther upstream a kaka flew across the valley. Going down the Waikamara, fantails and tomtits were observed.

Whio, or Mountain Duck.—One of these birds was seen in swift water in the upper Kawhatau. Another pair was found in a pool in the upper reaches of the Waikamara, and allowed us to get within a few feet of them. On the following day a pair floated down the river just in front of us. Apparently these birds have never been plentiful even in the earliest days. The swift streams with boulder-strewn beds and few backwaters where they are found must provide only sufficient feed to support a pair of birds over a distance of several miles; certainly aquatic insect life and fish appeared to be very scarce. Later, in conversation with Mr. Guthrie Smith, he confirmed that they had never been numerous, and that they were found in odd pairs as now.

Riflemen Wrens.—These birds were exceedingly numerous, and, indeed, for long spells they were hardly ever out of sight or hearing. As usual they were busy seeking for insects amongst the trees and shrubs, and it is possible that the amount of dead and dying timber in the country traversed (referred to below) might support a larger population of insects than if the bush were in the condition usually found.

DEER.

(1) Distribution.

While much more country was seen on the western side of the main range, a cursory glance at the bush-flats whilst proceeding up the branch of the Waipawa River to the Waipawa Saddle revealed no signs of deer until the scrub above the bush was reached. Deer-tracks in the river-bed sand, so abundant in all portions of the Kawhatau and Waikamara Valleys, were absent. The absence of deer on this (the eastern) portion visited is quite likely local. On the other hand, we understand that they are more plentiful in the western side throughout the range, and this may be because settlement is closer in to the main range in the east, this giving a smaller feeding-range for the animals; also making access for shooters and others easier, as certain of the roads end practically at the base of the main range.