

RABBITS.

The following paper on the rabbit nuisance, sent to the secretary by Mr. John Bisdee, of Hutton Park, was read at the August meeting of the Society:—

The destruction of rabbits is now, I believe, generally admitted to have become absolutely necessary, and from my own experience I have no hesitation in saying that had not some means been found of destroying them, one more year—increasing at the rate they have been—would have ruined every agricultural farm near where rabbits were numerous, and stock of all kinds must have starved. I have therefore much pleasure in giving any information that will assist fellow-sufferers in getting rid of one of the worst evils the landholder ever had to contend with.

I may first of all state that I have given my plan to several who have applied to me, and have been surprised to hear that on trial they cannot get the rabbits to take grain, and that when they do appear to have eaten it, it has not killed. My opinion is that rabbits will always take grain, and that if they do not, it is the fault of the person who mixes it—at all events I have never found them refuse it poisoned with strychnine except once, when the strychnine was dissolved in a copper I had mixed lime and sulphur in, and a coating of the sulphur had remained on the sides. To the second objection, that if they do eat the grain that it does not kill, this may arise from many causes, and I can assure anyone who has to contend with rabbits, that he must not expect to be able to destroy them without many difficulties and disappointments that his own brains must help him to get over. If I were to describe all the experiments I have had to make with strychnine, arsenic, and other poisons, as well as other ways to destroy these vermin, I should fill more paper than you would care about reading. But that rabbits can be destroyed I think would be evident to anyone who had seen them on parts of this estate in May last, and who would take the trouble to ride over it now. The expense of strychnine is, no doubt, a drawback, but until some way of getting them to take a cheaper poison is found, there is no alternative. I have killed numbers with arsenic, but should never have cleared parts of this property as I have done if I had not gone back to strychnine, and I believe that if properly dried the skins will pay for the strychnine.

I commenced by dissolving 1oz. strychnine in $1\frac{1}{2}$ gallons boiling water, with five teaspoonsful of muriatic acid; with this solution I pickled four bushels of wheat crushed. This

killed a great many, but not so many as I thought it ought. I then reduced the quantity of grain to three bushels, and changed from wheat to oats, but still did not pick up the numbers I expected. At that time I was using two different brands of strychnine, and found a very great difference in the numbers killed according to which sort I employed; so great was the difference that it took 2oz. of one brand to kill as many as 1oz. of the other, and I have no doubt one was a mixture of some sort. The brand to depend upon is "Jacop Hulle," and with the mixture I give below, carefully prepared, any number of rabbits can be killed. I have tried several experiments with this, and have dissolved 1oz. to one bushel, and yet did not pick up any more rabbits on the spot, they still travelled some distance, I think the faculty will be able to explain this; but I find that I get quite as many rabbits with 1oz. to two bushels, and have therefore lately kept to that quantity. Many have asked me whether it can be placed with safety on runs where sheep are running, and as I have heard it reported I had killed upwards of 500 sheep, the question is a serious one. I have laid it on some of my runs for the last two months, and have only found three sheep killed by it, and I think it likely they have been killed by the grain having in some places been laid too thick. The way to lay it on a sheep run is broadcast, and the quantity not more than a sower would cast at the rate of one bushel to the acre. I have laid many miles of it of this thickness without harm to anything except the rabbits, and a few kangaroo and kangaroo rats.

When I used wheat I found many white magpies were killed, but since using oats only a few. Crows appear almost poison proof. I think I have half the crows in the district here, and, as yet, have only seen a few killed, although they manage to clear up any number of dead rabbits the day after they (the rabbits) are killed.

My dogs live on the rabbits, and, as yet, without much harm—I have known them get a little too much, but a little strong tobacco water soon puts them right.

I will now give you my recipe which I can warrant, and if I was very hard up I would undertake to clear any estate infested with rabbits. The oats, if possible, should be crushed—as they absorb the poison better—and when once poisoned any amount of rain does not appear to affect them, which might not be the case if uncrushed; if crushed they should afterwards be winnowed to blow away the husks. In $1\frac{1}{2}$ gallons boiling water with five teaspoonsful muriatic acid, put 1 oz. strychnine, (less water will be sufficient if the grain is not crushed, say 1 gallon). Stir and let stand for 10 minutes. With this

solution pickle, in a tub, 80 lbs. of oats, or 120 of wheat or rye. Stir well until all is wet, let stand until next day when it will be ready for use. Lay it in trains, or broadcast it wherever the rabbits feed—if in trains not too thick—2 bushels will reach nearly two miles if properly laid.

As to the success I have met with, I can only say that I have killed many thousands; my men have collected some thousands of skins for which I pay them, as an inducement to them to lay the poison properly. I give them the use of all the sheds to dry the skins, which is done by hanging them on nails just as they come off the rabbits (inside out); but it is impossible to say the numbers that are destroyed, as in scrubby places I do not think more than half are found.

Where it is a marsh that rabbits frequent, and it can be cleared of sheep, so that the grain can be spread thick, many hundreds can be killed in one night; but it is often the case that the first evening it is laid it is not eaten—I think from some smell about it they do not like, which goes off by exposure.

I think that late in the summer will be a very good time to work on them, as they leave the dry hills for any marshy ground, and can then be got at easily. I killed a great many with acorns, cracked and mixed with this solution, and believe that in the dry weather leaves (such as elm leaves) soaked in it and spread would kill numbers.

I never knew the rabbits before this season eat the ferns and wattle bark. I also notice that where they bark the wattles they are generally very poor. This, of course, may arise from shortness of feed, but if you pass on half-a-mile, to where there are few wattles, the rabbits are as fat as pigs. I have weighed them upwards of four pounds, when skinned and dressed. The leaf of the fern they leave, and eat only the stem; the same with dead thistles, they eat all the stem and leave the old leaves.