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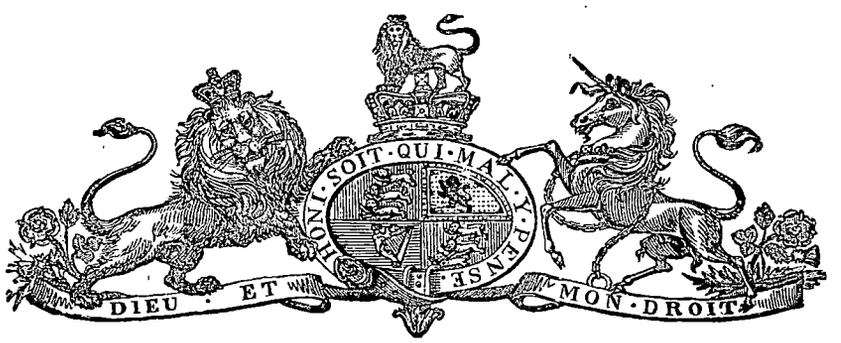
TASMANIA.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

SALMON IN TASMANIA.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Whyte; and ordered by the Council to be printed, July 18, 1865.



SALMON CORRESPONDENCE.

Acclimatisation Society's Office, 30, *Swanston-street*,
Melbourne, *4th April*, 1865.

Sir,

I am directed by the Council of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria to bring under your notice the enclosed paragraph which appeared in to-day's issue of the *Age*, and to request that you will be good enough to inform them, as early as you conveniently can, whether the statements therein contained have any foundation in fact.

The Council trust that such will not prove to be the case, and that you will enable them to meet at once, with a distinct denial, these disastrous statements.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient Servant,

GEO. SPRIGG, *Secretary*.

To the Hon. Dr. Officer, *M.H.A.*,
Chairman of Salmon Commissioners, Tasmania.

SALMON IN TASMANIA.

We regret to learn, from a reliable private source, that the impressions calculated to be left upon the public mind by some recent statements in the Hobart Town journals, in reference to the condition of the salmon parr in Tasmania, are far from being in accordance with the true state of affairs. The ideas conveyed in the announcement in question were that, in consequence of an unexpected mortality having broken out amongst the young fishes, a portion only of the survivors, amounting to 483 in number, had been liberated from the ponds into the River Plenty. The truth, however, is that the 483 parr thus liberated constitute, as far as can at present be ascertained, all the living representatives of the great salmon family at present inhabiting the waters of Tasmania. As soon as the mortality above referred to was observed, the breeding ponds were immediately, by direction of some of the Commissioners, and with the concurrence of Mr. Ramsbottom, so far drained as to leave but a little pool, not exceeding a foot in depth of water, in the main one. As the water subsided, the 483 parr were counted out into the river, and, after their transit had been effected, no indications of any remaining fish could be detected in the nearly waterless pond. Mr. Ramsbottom himself, in reply to questions put to him by a visitor who was present shortly after the liberation of the fishes, admitted that he knew of no other surviving parr than those whose number we have given above, but expressed a hope that, in the little remnant of water already mentioned, as many might be discovered by a complete drainage as would bring the total of known survivors up to 500. According to Mr. Ramsbottom, it was long since ascertained that 2000 of the ova were successfully hatched into living fish, and his estimate of the total subsequent mortality is below 500. A question, therefore, naturally arises as to what became of the 1000 surplus fishes over and above the (in round numbers) 500 survivors and 500 deceased; and to this, we believe, no satisfactory reply can be given. We learn that it has been conjectured, in some quarters, that these 1000 fishes have been destroyed by water rats, which are well known as deadly enemies of the salmon in the earliest stages of its growth; and this supposition derives a show of probability from the fact that at least one rat of the musk species is known to have been recently trapped in the immediate vicinity of the ponds, and that a *post mortem* examination disclosed in the creature's stomach the remains of fish which it had devoured. Under these circumstances, it cannot be denied that the prospects of the great salmon acclimatisation experiment in the neighbouring colony are far from being as cheering or hopeful as could be desired, a circumstance which must be looked upon as a legitimate ground for regret on the part, not alone of Tasmanians, but of residents in each and all of the Australian Colonies.

(Copy.)

New Norfolk, 11th April, 1865.

Sir,

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 4th instant, addressed to me by direction of the Acclimatisation Society, enclosing a copy of an article on the Salmon Ponds at the Plenty that lately appeared in the *Age* newspaper, and requesting me to inform the Council to what extent the statements contained therein are correct.

I lose no time in replying to your communication, and I believe I shall best fulfil the wishes of the Council by a brief narration of facts, from which the probable number of young Salmon now in existence may be estimated.

It is beyond all doubt that upwards of 3000 Salmon fry were admitted into the Pond from the breeding boxes. This number was arrived at by actual counting up to 1200, and by a careful computation of the numbers that were subsequently hatched until the process was completed.

That this estimate was not too high, is, I think, proved by the case of the Trout, the number of which, by a similar mode of observation, was computed at 120 only, but of which nearly 300 were afterwards captured and counted.

From the date of the admission of the Salmon fry into the ponds the observed mortality has been of a comparatively trifling amount, and has not exceeded a few hundreds. It is not believed by Mr. Ramsbottom, nor by Mr. Read, one of the Commissioners, near to whose residence the ponds are situated, and whose attention to our important charge has been close and unwearied, that any of the fish have been destroyed by other animals.

Some domestic rats, a few native water-rats, and platypuses, have from time to time appeared in the vicinity of the ponds; but these, through the constant vigilance maintained by Mr. Ramsbottom and his assistants, by day and by night, have always been promptly destroyed.

In the month of October last it was discovered by Mr. Ramsbottom that some unusual leakage was taking place along the course of the underground pipe leading from the deepest part of the pond into the Plenty, which had been laid down for the purpose of draining off the water when it might be considered necessary to clear out the accumulated mud and impurities. Fearing that some of the fish might be making their escape, Mr. Ramsbottom quickly placed a wooden box fitted up with perforated zinc at the further extremity of the pipe, in order to intercept any of the fish that might find their way through the fissure by which the water was escaping. This was first done in the evening, and on the following morning one fish only was found in the box, which being unharmed was restored to a secure part of the pond.

The escape of one fish would have been of little importance; but where one had passed through others might pass, and many may have escaped before the leakage was discovered. No time was lost in taking measures to stop the leak. This was a work of no small difficulty, as the pipe was fully 9 feet below the surface. In digging down to it, the leakage, by the disturbance of the earth, was considerably increased, and the fish began to pass through in great numbers. These, however, were all captured and returned to the Pond; and of the whole number thus secured only one was found to be injured. The pipe which has been the cause of the disaster was speedily removed, and its place filled in with clay.

No estimate could, of course, be formed of the number of fish that escaped into the Plenty on this occasion, but, as they subsequently appeared to be very numerous in the Pond, it was not believed to be large.

It was not until the late sickness showed itself, when the Commissioners deemed it advisable to remove the chief portion of the young Salmon into the Plenty, and for that purpose to have the water drawn off from the Pond, that it was discovered how large a number had already found their way into the river.

The removal of the fish was effected by cutting a channel from the Pond to the river, which was gradually deepened as the water subsided, and along which the Salmon readily passed into the box in which the channel terminated.

Nearly 500 were thus captured, the whole of which were at once set free in the river, with the exception of a few that were below the average size, which were returned to the Pond.

Although in this process all the still water was drawn off from the Pond, a brisk stream was necessarily kept running through it without interruption, in which a considerable number of fish remained, when the temporary channel was closed and the Pond again filled to the brim.

If the number of those liberated on this occasion, of those still remaining in the Pond, and of those that have died since their first admission into it, be reckoned at 1500, then an equal number at least can be accounted for in no other way than by supposing that they escaped into the Plenty, in the manner and at the period above referred to. That they did so escape I entertain no doubt, and I am confident that from first to last not less than 2000 have found their way into the Plenty.

It is a consolation to know that the escape of so large a number of the Salmon into the river will be regarded by some of the most eminent Pisciculturists of England as a fortunate accident, and the best mode in which they could have been disposed of.

Mr. Francis Francis, Mr. Frank Buckland, and other gentlemen of experience, regard the intervention of the Pond between the hatching boxes and the river as a mistake, and recommend that as soon as the young fry have been freed from the incumbrance of the umbilical appendage they should be set at large in the natural stream, where they are likely to thrive better than in an artificial Pond however carefully nursed and tended. Before this stage is reached they are the most helpless and defenceless of all creatures, and are, as is well known, devoured in vast numbers by other fish, so that a very small portion of those hatched in the river ever arrive at maturity. When it is passed, the power of rapid motion, which they quickly acquire, secures them from the attacks of their enemies Those that prematurely made their escape from our Pond had passed beyond this defenceless period of their life for upwards of four months, and were then strong active fish, whose rapidity of motion often surprised me as well as other beholders There is, therefore, every reason to believe that since their entrance into the Plenty they have thriven, and, with their relatives that by our permission have lately joined them, are still thriving in that healthful and pleasant stream, preparing at no distant period to enter on their seaward journey.

With regard to the mortality by which 52 young Salmon and 6 Trout were destroyed in the course of last month, neither Mr. Ramsbottom nor the Commissioners, after the most careful investigation, have been able to ascertain the cause of its occurrence. They can only regard it as an epidemic, the nature and source of which are beyond their research. All that died were healthy-looking fish in the highest condition. A considerable number were carefully dissected and examined under the microscope without the slightest trace of disease being discovered. It is a remarkable fact that out of 7 Trout that had long been associated with the Salmon in the large pond 4 perished, while in the small circular pond above, containing nearly 300 Trout, only 2 deaths occurred. That the disease which visited our ponds was of an epidemic character, seems to be established by the fact that a considerable number of Mullet (Grayling) were seen dead and dying in the Derwent at the same period.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,
Your obedient Servant,
R. OFFICER, *Chairman of Salmon Commissioners.*

GEORGE SPRIGGS, *Esquire,*
Secretary.

JAMES BARNARD,
GOVERNMENT PRINTER, TASMANIA.