

Tasmanian Field Naturalist Club references to *FOXES*

Archive research notes by **David Obendorf** (12 Jun 2008) relating to references to *FOXES* in *A Century Afield: A history of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club* by J Fenton, published by TFNC in 2004, pages 58 & 117

Reference on page 177:

'The TFNC was busy in its role as a conservation watchdog during the 1940's, objecting to fox fur farming proposals for the state.....'

July 1941 - TFNC Minutes

Mr Weymouth moved, Mr Sargison seconded, that the Club request the Government not to grant permits for the importation of the fox for fur farming purposes. Motion carried. The Chairman, asked that copies of the motion be sent to the Tasmanian Farmers, Stockowners and Orchardists Assn., the Animal and Birds Protection Board [Fauna Board]. Agreed.

21 August 1941- TFNC Minutes

From Premier (Mr Cosgrove) intimating, in reply to the Club's protest, that the Government did not propose to grant permits for the introduction of the fox; From the Fauna Board stating that the importation of the fox was prohibited under the Birds and Animals Protection Act; From the Farmers & Stockowners Assn., stating that the subject of the fox would be considered by the council; From the Leader of the Opposition (Mr H.S. Baker) asking for particulars about the damage caused by the fox in other States where it occurs and promising to oppose any move to grant permits for the introduction of the fox for fur farming purposes.

On this subject the Hon. Secretary reported that the Club was justified in protesting against the proposal to licence the import of foxes because of the damage which the fox on the Mainland had caused to birds and small mammals. At no time could the Club be accused of not having warned the authorities about the potential harm attaching to the introduction of these animals.

Annual Report - TFNC 1941

[Paragraph 6] - Chiefly through the Club's representations, Parliament resolved that no foxes should be introduced to Tasmania for fur-farming purposes. It will be remembered that the Government early in the year indicated that the fur farming company might be given a permit to bring in the silver fox. Fearing that the common fox [introduced European Red fox] might be shipped in under the guise of the more valuable kind, the Hon. Secretary immediately protested against the proposal to bring any kind of fox into the State because of the potential harm to native bird life already sadly depleted, and in the Legislative Council the Fur Farm Bill was amended in the desired direction.

Note: All letters of correspondence relating to this matter are not archived with TFNC correspondence and related papers files at the Archives Tasmania Office, ref. no. NS/1428/1

Reference on page 58:

'Even less welcome was the fox. Naturalists were outraged when Mr Sharland reported in 1949 on a statement that a pair [of foxes] had been liberated in Tasmania. The club resolved to call for a government enquiry and if necessary offer a reward for their capture.'

Comment

Since 2001 the State Government's focus has been to convince the community that the threat of fox establishment in Tasmania has only come about since the importation of several litters of fox cubs in 1999 or 2000 or 2001. This allegation remains to this day unsubstantiated.

And yet there is a quantity of documentary evidence to confirm that foxes were deliberately introduced on several occasions during the 19th century; at least two incidents where foxes have entered with containerised interstate freight and several community reports of releases of foxes during the early to middle part of the 20th century for free-release by a fox hunt club. There are historical reports from a number of sources, including first-hand witnesses, claiming that hunt clubs and individuals imported foxes for hunting purposes during the first half of the 20th century. In July 1949 the Tasmanian Field Naturalist Club called for a government inquiry into the report presented to the Club by the then Superintendent and Secretary of Scenic Reserves in the Department of Lands and Preservation respected Tasmanian biologist, Michael Sharland that a pair of foxes had been liberated in Tasmania.

18 Aug 1949 - TFNC Minutes

'Foxes in Tasmania' - Mr Sharland reported to the Club on a statement that a pair of foxes had been liberated in Tasmania. He suggested that the Club should ask the Government to conduct an inquiry into the matter and if necessary offer a reward of the capture of any of these animals.

Mr Wilson moved an approach be made to the Government along the lines suggested by Mr Sharland. It was seconded by Mr T.A. Thwaites.

15 September 1949 - TFNC Minutes

'Foxes' - It was reported that advice had been received from the Attorney-General stating that investigations into the matter were being carried out extensively.

Tasmanian Field Naturalists' Club wrote to the Government. The Minutes of the September 1949 meeting report correspondence on foxes from the Attorney-General stating that 'investigations into the matter were being carried out extensively'.

Note: The letters referring to these matters are not in the correspondence files at the Archives Tasmania Office, ref. no. NS/1428/1]

Postscript: Whilst researching this issue in the ATO one of the archivists stated that the Office was currently archiving the personal papers and diaries of Mr Nigel Brothers, a retired Senior Wildlife Biologist with the Tasmanian PWS. Mr Brothers' papers refer to reliable sightings of foxes in Tasmania in the 1970s.