

WADERS WALKING ON WATERWEED

The true Lilytrotters *Jacanidae* are not found in New Zealand. However, during the summer of 1969-70 I was able to watch three species of waders, drawn from three different genera, walking, feeding or resting on mats of water-weed that was alive and floating over fairly deep water, as distinct from broken weed, swept by the wind into rotting piles on a lee shore.

On 27/12/69 when I looked down upon a narrow stretch of L. Karapiro where the R. Waikato flows between cliffs on one side and grassy slopes on the other, it was surprising to see six Pied Stilts *Himantopus leucocephalus* walking delicately and obviously feeding over beds of what I took to be some species of white water-buttercup in full flower, possibly *Ranunculus fluitans*. From time to time a Stilt would stumble where the mat was too thin. The weed was loosely anchored in water that was quite deep and flowing fairly fast. If this was not lily-trotting in the strict sense, it was a passable imitation of it. Between the beds of living weed and the bank was open water in which a dozen or more Scaup *Aythya novaeseelandiae* were cruising sleepily.

On 30/12/69 I found my way to the Pilot Station Reserve, Wairau Bar, Marlborough. A short distance inland from the boulder beach there is a long lagoon. This still held plenty of fresh or slightly brackish water, but much of its surface was covered by a firm mat of flannel-weed *Enteromorpha* sp.

At my approach some Pied Stilts, among which were agitated parents and full-winged young, and a small flock of Banded Dotterels *Charadrius bicinctus* flew out and settled on the weed near the middle of the pool. There they were later joined by a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*; and then by two more which had been feeding busily along the edge of the lagoon in a quiet corner. Their first flight was short, about 15 yards, across open water to the nearest patch of floating weed, where they paused as if reluctant to leave such a safe and fruitful feeding-ground. Some of the Banded Dotterels were now seen to be running about on the weed-mat as if hunting larvae or chasing flies.

On 25/1/70 I was able to take another leisurely walk beside this lagoon. Marlborough had been enjoying its traditional summer. The countryside was parched and the heat around the stony edges of the lagoon was blistering. But there was still plenty of water and for some species of waders the lagoon was still a desirable habitat. When I arrived in the hot afternoon, nine Banded Dotterels, seven Stilts and presumably the same three Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were already standing quietly on the floating yellowish-green carpet of *Enteromorpha* some sixty yards out from the dried mud and hot stones which now ringed the pool. Was this their way of taking an afternoon siesta in comparatively cool security?

— R. B. SIBSON