

At the Sanctuary – 25th January, 2017

Robyn Howard

Still no significant rain at the sanctuary, more trees are dead and dying. Many of the male Milky Mangroves in open areas have produced flowers and then died, while female trees have produced fruit but lost all their leaves. The Cotton Trees (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*) have lost many leaves and the remainder are yellowing. The Scrambling Clerodendrums have dropped as much as eighty percent of their foliage. If there is good soaking rain soon, they will recover, and new trees will take the places of those which have lost the battle for life.

As I began my walk, in the bottom corner of the garden beyond the Wilf Harris Bird Bath, Rufous Fantails and Little Shrike-thrushes chased insects through the Brown Pine, while a Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove called from the rainforest. There are fewer being heard this season. Laughing Kookaburras were upset by something and sounded more like “Complaining Kookaburras”! Black Prince Cicadas are somewhere near peak numbers and are present in every habitat, even the melaleucas where they are generally not loud, and especially in the mangroves where they were ear-splitting at times.

Pink Euodias were in bloom and being visited by Lewin’s and Brown Honeyeaters, as well as a lone Dusky Honeyeater. Large-billed Scrubwrens and a White-throated Treecreeper searched nearby vines and the bark of trees for insects and Brown Gerygones hovered around the outer leaves.

As I walked on, a couple of Eastern Yellow Robins, a male Golden Whistler, and a male Mistletoebird provided glorious colour. Grey Fantails chased each other through the canopy and a family of four Grey Shrike-thrushes flitted around the upper canopy, calling constantly. Some Four-spined Spiders had slung their webs between trees.

I was surprised when I reached the mangroves that the tide was high enough to have covered the mudflats. No crabs were visible when I detoured to the bird hide, but I found that some Grey Mangroves had begun to blossom. I did spot the Shining Flycatcher male. There is a small orange moth which frequents the low branches and trunks of the mangroves and small birds often chase them. Today it was a Wall Skink which pounced on one and scuttled off to consume it.

It was really interesting at the crab viewing platform. A pair of Collared Kingfishers called back and forth to each other on the far side of the waterway, but I did not catch even a glimpse. Suddenly, I heard the Azure Kingfisher call and a pair flew up the waterway only 30 cm above the water, the front bird carrying what appeared to be a white feather, disappearing into low-growing Grey Mangroves just where they had apparently nested earlier in the season. I took out my stool and settled down to see what eventuated. Brown Honeyeaters and Mangrove Gerygones foraged above me, but I did not see the kingfishers again, so do not know what the feather was about. In

fact, I am not completely certain it was a feather, but could not make anything else out of it.

In the meantime, the tide had receded and lots of crabs were emerging onto the wet mud. Orange-clawed Fiddlers, (many of them being white juveniles), a few Semaphore Crabs, lots of Furry-clawed Crabs (most of them tiny), some Scarlet Three-spined Mangrove Crabs, and a number of other crabs which I at first took to be Purple and Cream Shore Crabs because of their colour. However, on closer inspection, they certainly were not. Their shape was roughly that of the Scarlet Three-spined Mangrove Crab, but their colour did not match, and some features were very different. It was their behaviour which first attracted my attention and their burrow was also quite different, so these crabs are an enigma to me. I contacted the Queensland Museum as the Curator of Crustaceans has been a great help in the past, but he is on leave and will have a backlog when he returns. I shall need to exercise great patience waiting to hear his response.

Numbers of butterflies were low. Perhaps the heat and dry conditions mean blossom does not contain the usual supply of nectar. I did see five Swamp Tiger Butterflies, which is quite good for one day.





Photos: Lewin's Honeyeater
Mistletoebird – male – Photo: Mary Hynes
Pink Euodia
Flowers – Grey Mangrove
Furry-clawed Crab – this tiny one is only 6 mm across the carapace
Below is one of the unidentified crabs with unusual colours and
strange behaviours



The new crab for the Sanctuary that has been identified as *Sarmatium germaini*.