

At The Sanctuary – May, 2017

Robyn Howard

It is still a real pleasure to walk in the forests and see the beautiful, abundant, fresh greens everywhere. Some of the plants have grabbed the opportunity and have buds and flowers, although it is not their normal season. The Estuary Mistletoe is in bloom. Early in the month, it was a very poor showing, but by the end of the month, it was far healthier. It taps into the sap of the host tree for its sustenance, and in the poor conditions, sap flow was probably limited, resulting in low flower production, but once sap flow improved after rain, so did the health of the mistletoe. The big old Grey Mangrove near the shelter shed on the riverbank did not fare well in the summer and several of its branches have died, making it less handsome. It is an ancient tree so I hope it recovers well. The leaves of some White Cedar trees are turning yellow, preparing for their autumn fall. The White Cedar is one of our few deciduous or semi-deciduous trees in this region.

The birds have been singing loudly and flitting about, seemingly enjoying life. The Scarlet Honeyeaters have frequented the canopy, the Spectacled Monarchs are still beside the early part of the walking track, Brown Thornbills have been issuing their little trills, and the Brown Gerygones have been calling as they hover at the edge of foliage. The Noisy Pitta has not been heard during the day, but is searching for food on the forest floor. I found a male Golden Whistler with a young bird just beginning the change to his adult plumage. It seemed the adult was teaching the young bird its calls. The adult did a call, the young bird repeated it. This happened several times, and then the adult did a new call, again repeated by the young bird. Two more repetitions, and the adult flew off. A family group of Red-backed Fairy-wrens chased insects through the Mangrove Ferns in the Melaleuca forest, not their normal habitat. Nearby, a Lewin's Honeyeater was checking under the leaves of the Cotton Trees, finding plenty of snacks.

A pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagles flew about in graceful patterns for a week or so, honking rhythmically, and then only one bird was in flight. The female must now be incubating on a nest. A pair of Brahminy Kites slowly glided over the river before alighting in a tree on the far bank of the river. A Striated Heron lurked amongst the mangrove roots, freezing in position so I would not notice it, while one of the Azure Kingfishers flew swiftly past the crab viewing platform. A Sacred Kingfisher perched in a Grey Mangrove, but made no sound. The Mangrove Gerygones sang softly. Many Scaly-breasted Lorikeets have come from higher altitudes to avail themselves of the Melaleucas which are in bloom.

Most of the fungi now visible are those on dead woods. I photographed one which fascinated me with its hairy appearance. Judith identified it as a "Hairy Trumpet" (*Lentinus fasciatus*) – very aptly named. She tells me it will be found on dead wood, and this was the case, found at the end of a small dead branch of an Orange Mangrove.

Crabs have been continuing to feed on the mud flats, especially the Orange-clawed Fiddlers. It seems that there are lots out of their burrows no matter what time of day it is. A couple of species which were not prevalent for a couple of months (Red-fingered Marsh Crab and Pacific Blue Sentinel), have again been active above ground, though the former seems quite skittish, disappearing at any movement. Many molluscs are in the mud near the crab hides, and some have climbed up onto leaves. Mud whelks are amongst the roots of the Orange Mangroves.



Scrambling Clerodendrum (*Clerodendrum inerme*) blossoming out of season



Hairy Trumpet (*Lentinus fasciatus*)



The rain breathed fresh life into the mosses on this casuarina near the riverbank



One of the Red-fingered Marsh Crabs tried to hide under a log.



Unidentified mollusc on River Mangrove leaf.