

At The Sanctuary – 28th May, 2015

Robyn Howard

After a couple of months when I had been unable to spend time in the Sanctuary, this proved a beautiful day to be wandering along the tracks. Our continuing magnificent weather gave blue skies, gentle breezes, and very mild temperatures. As I drove down Sports Road where the workers were preparing to bitumen the road, mounds of sandy loam were heaped on the sides. Typically, the Striated Pardalotes had discovered the piles and found them an ideal site for nest tunnel construction. Sadly, it is unlikely that the young will be sufficiently advanced to survive the disturbance of the mounds.

Judith accompanied me for much of the walk, so she was able to point out several fungi – some old, faded and dry, and some fresh and bright. She had previously told me of some tiny interesting fungi she had found on an earlier visit, but when she showed them to me, I was amazed that she had ever managed to find them. They were minute! Not as large as a pin-head! There was again a small amount of a red fungus which grows on the bases of casuarinas. At times, there are many examples of it, but for many months, we had been unable to find it. It will be great if Judith and her friends identify it.

Many small birds were calling in the car-park, and the song was beautiful, but mostly only Lewin's and Brown Honeyeaters were easily visible. For the whole walk, it seemed to be the small birds which were predominant. The Mangrove Gerygone song was lovely all through the mangrove areas.

In the Melaleuca forest, surface water lay in many places, so there were still mosquitoes there and near closed forests. However, in the open areas, the mud was drying and very few crabs were feeding whilst in areas kept moist in the shade of thick mangroves, Maroon Mangrove Crabs, Furry-clawed Crabs and a few Broad-fronted Mangrove Crabs were feeding. It was low tide, and the sides of the waterway at the crab hides were still very damp and obviously ideal for crabs to be out. At the hide closest to the river, there were literally hundreds and hundreds of crabs, with Orange-clawed Fiddlers predominating. A few bait fish were in the shallow water, as well as Striped and Common Toadfish.

Watching the fiddlers, I became interested in the proportion of males with large left claws compared with the numbers with large right claws. To make a comparison, I drew imaginary lines to afford a specific section where I was able to count all males, identify their species, and note their predominant claw. I ignored the females which were in roughly equivalent numbers. The results were:

Orange-clawed Fiddlers – 51 Large Left Claw, 19 Large Right Claw

Sunburst Fiddlers – 5 Large Left Claw, 1 Large Right Claw

Grey-clawed Fiddler – 1 Large Right Claw

The counts would only be really meaningful when done with high numbers of crabs evident, and continued over a long period, but even this single count is interesting.

Very few butterflies and other insects were noticed, but a beautiful Scarlet Jezebel caught my attention.



Sunburst Fiddler Crab – Male – Left Large Claw



Female Orange-clawed Fiddler, Mudskipper, and Male Orange-clawed Fiddler



Scarlet Jezebel