

At the Sanctuary – 18th June, 2015

Robyn Howard

After three rainy days, it was warm and sunny, and an ideal time to be at the sanctuary. The roadway was wet and muddy, and it seems a couple of occurrences of wet weather may have put back the completion of the upgrade to bitumen surface. The birds which usually frequent the road verges were absent. Their habitat has been badly damaged and the constant presence of men and machines has not been to their liking. Hopefully, once the works are completed, they will return.

It was a good day for small birds, both in the garden and the forests. The honeyeaters and Golden Whistlers flitted in the trees, picking off insects. The Willie Wagtail was its usual active self, singing to its heart's content. The Eastern Yellow Robin darted from its perch near the concrete path and caught moths from the grassy area. As I walked into the Melaleuca Forest, there was almost a cacophony of calls from Eastern Whipbirds, Large-billed Scrubwrens, Brown Thornbills, Brown Gerygones, Little Shrike-thrushes, Scarlet and Brown Honeyeaters, and the White-throated Treecreeper. It perched on the side of trees and called loudly several times. It is interesting that it is one of the species using the Wilf Harris Bird Bath, with photos taken by the Sunday volunteers proving the point.

Further along the walkway, the Grey Fantails, Mangrove Gerygones, Rufous Whistlers, Grey Shrike-thrushes and a vocal Shining Bronze-Cuckoo entertained. I had looked and looked for the Bronze-Cuckoo but was not successful until it seemingly gave up trying to attract my attention and landed right beside me. Folk coming up from the Blue Laguna moored at the pontoon disturbed the White-throated Nightjar which flew silently past me. The magnificent White-bellied Sea-Eagle cruised above the river.

Mudskippers were in abundance beside the waterways. Many were quite small. As I watched, one individual in particular seemed to skip back and forth across the surface of the small drainage canal near the bird hide. It was obviously replenishing its water supply to remain oxygenated, but had its own way of doing so. Mullet, Whiting and small bait species of fish were common near the crab hide. It was an ideal time for crab viewing and I observed hundreds on the mudflats and banks.

Having counted the numbers of left-clawed and right-clawed male fiddler crabs last month, I did a similar count for portion of the bank. Quite a different result – Orange-clawed Fiddlers had 36 left large clawed and 30 right large clawed, while the Sunburst Fiddlers had 1 large left clawed and 3 large right claws. No Grey-clawed Fiddlers were found. Other species noted throughout included Pacific Blue-clawed Sentinels, Maroon Mangrove Crabs and the inevitable Furry-clawed Crabs. I was able to take a couple of good photos of the fiddlers, and even captured some video of both males and females feeding.

The Grey Mangroves had dropped a great deal of their crop. It was unusual that so much had fallen in a short time, and I wondered whether the rainfall after some dry had caused the drop, and even the prolonged heat of summer may have had some effect. Flowering normally occurs from about February until as late as June, with fruit drop in the warmer months around December. The River Mangroves are producing buds at present. Their flowering and fruiting has been variable over past months also.

At least three species of mistletoe are flowering, so the small honeyeaters are enjoying their nectar. A couple of Mistletoebirds were in the Mangrove Forests, but they were chasing insects. Very few butterflies were braving the winter weather, but I did find a large one I was unable to identify before it disappeared into the rainforest. Two periods of rain have allowed some recovery of much of the vegetation which had been stressed during the dry heat. The Clerodendrum has transformed from almost bare branches to be healthy and well-foliaged. Some of the fungi have sported their fruiting bodies, so I hope Judith is able to find identities for them.

Rain seems to clean and brighten all the plants and make everything so fresh.



Fallen Grey Mangrove Fruit in excessive numbers



Orange-clawed Fiddler Crab – Male – Left large claw