

At the Sanctuary – 5th September, 2015

Robyn Howard

Spring has certainly sprung at the Wetlands Sanctuary. Plants are displaying new foliage, birds are singing their territorial and mating songs, and nesting is occurring in all habitats.

As I left the car, a male Golden Whistler was singing loudly near the mangrove room. He moved around several areas in the garden, all the while giving announcements that this was his territory. I was sure there would be a nest nearby, but he was too clever for me; I could not find it. The Willie Wagtail was conspicuous by his absence, so he was probably either building or defending a nest. Many of the small birds were prominent throughout the sanctuary, and it was so lovely just to listen and observe. White-browed Scrubwrens sang near the pathway at the entry and amongst the Mangrove Ferns, which they shared with Eastern Whipbirds and Brown Thornbills. Brown Gerygones were near the rainforest. I do not see their nests which are generally a fairly visible structure.

A single Dusky Honeyeater fed in the mistletoes and Mistletoebirds were in the Casuarina forest and along the river bank. Out near the river, birds were prolific. The Azure Kingfisher had returned and Collared and Sacred Kingfishers were also present. In one small area near the shelter shed, Rufous Whistlers, Grey Fantails, Red-backed Fairywrens, Variegated Fairywrens, Red-browed Finches, Brown Thornbills, Brown Honeyeaters, Scarlet Honeyeaters, Lewin's Honeyeaters and Shining Bronze-Cuckoos were all calling and feeding. I had seen the Bronze-Cuckoos in each forest area, and when I went back to the garden area, there was one there creating havoc. It was doing its "flocking" call, and all the birds seemed to recognize that it was looking for somebody's nest in which to place its egg. The other birds were flying back and forth near it, making it most unwelcome, and trying to ensure that their nest was not the one to be chosen as foster home for this cuckoo offspring.

Several mistletoes were blossoming and some of the Swamp Oak Mistletoes (*Amyema cambagei*) were heavily in fruit. In one casuarina, I found a clump of mistletoes of three differing species – Variable Mistletoe (*Amyema congener*), *Amyema cambagei*, and Golden Mistletoe (*Notothixos subaureus*) which only grows on other mistletoes.

Many of the fallen fruit of the Grey Mangrove had sprouted but few of them will survive. The River Mangroves are in bud with just a few flowers opened. Having had rain recently, vegetation was looking healthier than early in the year. The Marine Couch near the far crab hide is slowly recovering. Most of it died during long periods of inundation from floods and high tides in 2011, and it is slow to regenerate.

Crabs were out enjoying the warmth of the sun on the bank. It was interesting to see the variations in carapace colour of the female Orange-clawed Fiddler Crabs. Males like to chase other males from their territories, but they tolerate females sharing with them.

No mosquitoes yet, and bitumen road all the way to the sanctuary!



Colour variation – Female Orange-clawed Fiddler Crab



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Sacred Kingfisher



Shining Bronze-Cuckoo