

At the Sanctuary – November, 2017

Robyn Howard

Our microbats should certainly be well-fed right now. They eat up to their own weight in insects each night and should be able to consume mosquitoes and satisfy their needs very easily. Warm weather and regular rainfall has provided excellent breeding conditions for the mosquitoes and the current treatments seem not to have been as effective as in the past. They are prolific in the closed forests, but once in the more open mangrove areas, there are just a few.

As I arrived for a visit towards the end of the month, I finally heard the calls of the Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves, at least a month later than usual in arriving. As usual, plenty of other bird calls sounded around the car-park and gardens. The Macarangas have been heavily in bloom and there was a spread of cream fallen flowers beneath the trees. Lots of insects were in the flowers still on the trees, and Silvereyes were chasing them, but no honeyeaters were present. A friend had driven into the car-park early one evening and enjoyed watching the antics of a Large-tailed Nightjar he disturbed.

The Native Wisteria has been in flower high in the canopy. The fallen blossom, beautiful delicate mauve pea-flowers, drew my attention to it. Beside the concrete part of the track, the Burny Vine (*Trophus scandens*) has been heavily in fruit. I'd tried unsuccessfully to identify the plant previously, but having seen it fruiting made it much easier. It grows naturally in littoral rainforests and coastal riparian zones. Carol commented that it looked like an early Christmas and put a photo on Facebook.

With so much rain, the Melaleuca Forest is looking great – new growth everywhere – and the Milky Mangroves there are also in flower. In the sunnier places, some have already produced fruit. I found several male Golden Whistlers perched prominently and proclaiming joyfully. Amongst the Casuarinas, a male Mistletoebird flitted about, going through the full repertoire of his calls, but down amongst the Mangrove Ferns, a small flock of White-browed Scrubwrens was cranky about an intruder but I was unable to see what the annoyance was.

In open areas towards the Mangrove Forests, Estuarine slugs were grazing the mud along with several species of small molluscs. Where the tide had increased the water depth, two Common Pike Eels, 5 Common Toados, and more than 20 Striped Toadfish, along with many juvenile and bait fish swam over the mudflats. At last, in the mangroves, there were hundreds of Mangrove Cicadas calling (or stridulating), but none of the other expected species was heard.

When the tide receded, the crabs were very active and species which were absent or in small numbers in earlier months were again increasing in visible numbers. We have a crab named Haswell's Shore Crab (*Helograpsus haswellianus*) which comes in three colour forms – brown, honey, and pink. None of them are common and I had only seen one of the pink form near the crab-viewing platform in the past, but four were on the same log.

Birds were again frequenting the area. I had already seen the female Shining Flycatcher but from the platform I found Royal Spoonbills, White Ibis, Eastern Great Egret, Mangrove Gerygones, Grey Shrike-thrush, Willie Wagtail, Rufous Whistler, Rufous Fantails, Collared Kingfisher (I heard the Azure Kingfisher but did not sight it), and the Striated Heron flew in overhead. Whistling Kite and Brahminy Kite were over the river.



Looking up at the Native Wisteria



Macaranga tanarius flowering. Several plants in the garden and near the beginning of the track.



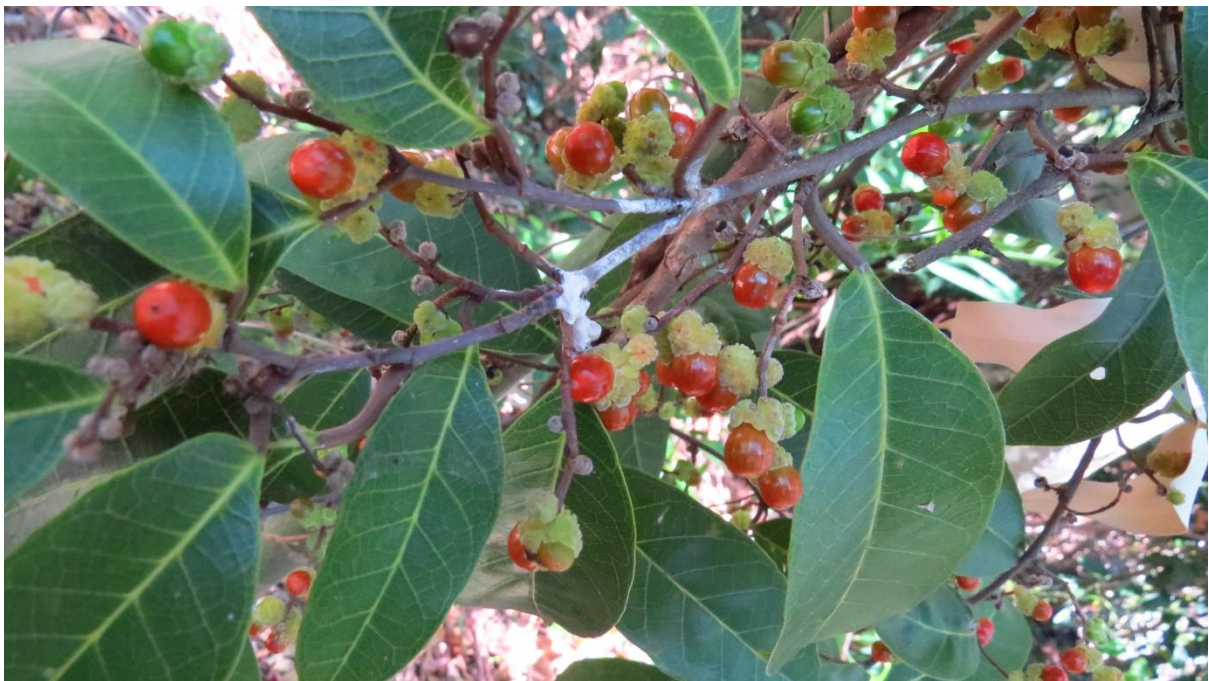
Haswell's Shore Crab – Honey colour form and Brown colour form. The crab on the left has lost its right claw and two of its right legs. These will regrow during future moults.



Haswell's Shore Crab – Pink colour form



Broad-fronted Mangrove Crab feeding on the algae on a pneumatophore of a Grey Mangrove



Burny Vine (*Trophis scandens*) fruiting beside the early part of the walkway. The common name sounds like a good warning not to touch it!