

## At the Sanctuary – October, 2017

Robyn Howard

A wet October has meant that mosquitoes are rife over much of the Sunshine Coast, and it is no different at the Wetlands Sanctuary. A good spray of repellent and protective clothing were wise choices for visitors. Some of the private schools braved the conditions, and one school even did quite a long walk in the rain. Experiencing the sanctuary in all conditions is rewarding.

I am not sure why, but the car-park is almost always popular with the birds. On one occasion, there were Eastern Osprey (circling above), Silvereyes, Varied Trillers, Peaceful Doves (they are usually down the road), Mistletoebirds, Bar-shouldered Doves, Grey and Rufous Fantails, Grey and Little Shrike-thrush, Lewin's and Brown Honeyeaters, Golden Whistler, Eastern Yellow Robin, Australasian Figbirds, Spangled Drongo, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Rainbow Lorikeets, Pale-headed Rosellas, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Brown Thornbill, plus other species I heard but did not see.

The spring rain changed the atmosphere along the walk. Gone were the wilting plants, everything appeared clean and fresh with lots of new growth, the River Mangroves continued to bloom, and the Milky Mangroves were sprouting early buds. However, there were two anticipated sounds which were missing. Peak season for cicadas is from November to February, but some species commence their advertising from around August. In the wetlands this year they were still silent. The other call I expect to hear from October through to April is that of the Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove. They move about to seek out the fruiting rainforest trees and seem to remember where they found good supplies in previous years. It is possible they have found another source which is providing excellent food, or the other likelihood is that the crazy weather patterns have altered the fruiting seasons in the lowland rainforest here. Should this be the case, it is sad for the frugivorous birds of this area.

One of our visitors had a wonderful experience watching a Yellow-footed Antechinus. Richard captured some beautiful photos of the little fellow and has donated them to us. One of the photos is amongst the items on our Facebook. George has continued putting out the motion camera and helping to keep watch on the night-time activities of some of our creatures. At this point, none of the nocturnal birds has wanted to appear on camera! Some of our mammals are more cooperative, and it has proved that one of our elusive animals is still resident. Nobody had seen the Short-beaked Echidna for a couple of years, but it has appeared a few times on camera. It never chooses an ideal spot for the photo, but tracks right near the lens, so all we find recorded is lots of spikes. Fortunately, we cannot mistake the spikes for anything else.

The crabs have been finding sufficient food in the wet muddy areas. As always, the Orange-clawed Fiddler Crabs are common and visitors notice them, but there have been mixed feeding groups near the crab-viewing platform – both Australian and Pacific Blue-clawed Sentinels, Furry-clawed Crabs, Maroon Mangrove Crabs, Semaphore Crabs and even a few Scarlet Three-spined Mangrove Crabs.

The high tides mean good sightings of the juvenile and other small fish swimming above the mudflats. After the heavy rains, the river water was very turbid, and yet we were still able to see the activity in the shallow inundation. There are many species but it is difficult to identify juveniles. At least one large fish had ventured up the waterway to chase smaller fish and was splashing at irregular intervals, but all I saw in the murkiness was flashes of silver.

As always, the bird sound has been wonderful with the Brown Honeyeaters leading the chorus. Both Sacred and Collared Kingfishers have called constantly, and the Mangrove Gerygones have performed softly in the background. The Grey Shrike-thrush melody was enjoyed in the car-park and near the river. Eastern Great Egrets, Royal Spoonbills, White-faced Herons and Australian White Ibis paraded along the waterway and river edge watching intently for prey, while the Azure Kingfisher perched waiting for movement in the water below indicating a possible meal. One sad happening for the bird population. Last year, the Australian Owlet-Nightjars nested near the pontoon and laid three eggs. Unfortunately, the site was too near the boardwalk and they were constantly disturbed and flew from the nest. Although the eggs hatched, the nestlings soon died. It was hoped that they were young birds and would learn from the experience, but not so, as they chose the same site again this year with exactly the same result. This is a good argument for nest boxes, so a friend of the sanctuary has built a couple of boxes to provide a new opportunity for these birds. Near the Information Centre, it is usual to find Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey and Rufous Fantails, and the Spectacled Monarchs are just down the track. The bird bath is always worth checking. One day towards the end of the month, I was watching four different birds dip and splash and retreat and repeat, when a beautiful male Golden Whistler chose to splash a little and then just spread his wings and enjoyed “crouching” in the water.

Taking a walk in the sanctuary is always an enjoyable experience for the ambience and wonderful walking track, but casting a keen eye and listening with thought and interest makes it a far more incredible experience.



If only “Spikey” would pose further from the camera! Short-beaked Echidna. Photo: George Cowie



Lewin's Honeyeater



Spangled Drongo Photo: Sandra Harald



Australian Owlet-Nightjar in tree hollow



Photo: Richard

Yellow-footed Antechinus