

At the Sanctuary – Dec 2017 and Jan 2018

Robyn Howard

These summer months were as hot and steamy as we expect here on the Sunshine Coast, but in contrast to last year, we were receiving rainfall when it was needed.

A particular event really spoilt my enjoyment on one visit. A group of four jet-skiers raced down the river, damaging the banks with their wash, with the loser deciding to zig-zag recklessly making the wash far worse. The noise and wakes were dreadful for every other river user.

On a more pleasant note (no pun intended), birds and cicadas competed to top the sound charts. The usual feathered friends were active and singing, and some even were hoping to raise families. So many species of cicadas were calling that it was quite difficult to separate the calls for identification. Razor Grinders, which I'd only encountered in the garden in the past, were calling in the mangroves near the river, and Bottle Cicadas continued their short chorus near the buildings. They seem to sing for only ten to twenty minutes each evening.



Razor Grinder

Butterflies appreciate the heat and besides ones we see regularly, a Leafwing and a Chequered Swallowtail made a welcome appearance. Some of the skippers (a different

type of butterfly) perched on vines at the edge of the rainforest.



Orange Grass-dart – one of the skippers

The other heat-lovers are the crabs, so they have been plentiful, especially after the extremely high tides. The crab which we found for the first time last year again made some appearances. *Sarmatium germaini* is so handsome.



Sarmatium germaini

It has always been entertaining to watch Spotted Scat swim and splash in water which seemed too shallow for them, but this summer, only one of them was visible – most days, none. As those high tides receded, there were so many small fish. The mullet were pecking at the algae on the Grey Mangrove pneumatophores.

The Pink Euodias (*Melicope elleryana*) flowered in profusion beside the road and in the forests. The pinks of buds and flowers were exquisitely exhibited, and birds and insects alike were sipping at the nectar.



Pink Euodia

For the first time ever at the wetlands, I discovered flowers on the Mangrove Vine. This is the vine which the Swamp Tiger (butterfly) needs for breeding. Another flowering vine in the forest beside the road was the Climbing Guinea Flower, *Hibbertia scandens*. The Supplejack out beside the river had mature fruit.



Climbing Guinea Flower



Supplejack Fruit – high in the canopy
Birds are always wonderful to watch and hear. A couple of raptors provided magnificent sights. The White-bellied Sea-Eagle left its perch across the river, then flew overhead, silently gliding above the convergence of the mangroves and river edge. A young Eastern Osprey had taken a smallish fish for himself and chose the top of a dead casuarina to tear off small pieces of flesh to consume, gradually

demolishing his prize before cleaning his beak against the rough bark.



Eastern Osprey – satisfied after a meal
Something must have disturbed a White-throated Nightjar from its daytime roost, and its temporary perch in the mangroves near the boardwalk proved not to be a wise choice as I disturbed it again as I returned from the river. Channel-billed Cuckoos have visited more often this summer, and it was great to find a Little Bronze-Cuckoo. The boxes which Bruce made for the Australian Owlet-nightjars have now been placed, so we can just hope the birds know what they are for!



Graeme took a splendid photo of one of the Owlet-nightjars.



Australian Owlet-nightjar - evening
Photo: Graeme Toft

For several months, the female Shining Flycatcher could occasionally be seen flitting around mangrove roots chasing insects, but at last in January, the male drew attention to himself by flying across the boardwalk and joining his mate above the mangrove mud.

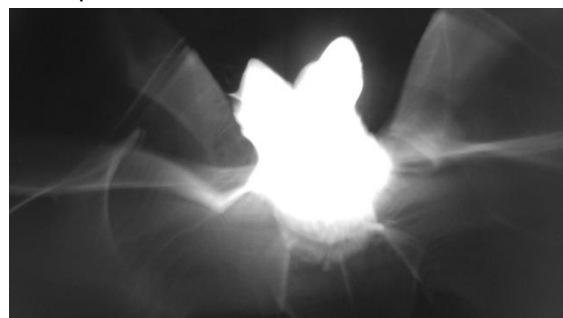
Seeding grasses beside the road, along with the thicker growth after the warm rains, have meant the area is again active with Red-browed Finches, Fairy-wrens, and other small birds. The most thrilling sighting was a Tawny Grassbird. Once seen irregularly, this was the first I'd seen in years at the sanctuary. On the dam across the road, 23 Plumed Whistling-ducks dropped by to visit the other waterbirds – an Australasian Grebe with a stripey youngster, Dusky Moorhens with three tiny chicks, and another pair collecting and placing twigs on their developing nest. On another day, a Black-necked Stork, often called a Jabiru, seemed to follow the road as its flight-path.

Because the Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves arrive about the same time each year, it tweaked my curiosity about the fruit which was attracting them. Figs seemed most likely, so a search began. First choice, the White Fig, had already finished fruiting. BUT! In looking for the White Fig, I found another fig which was not on our flora list. Very difficult to get good photos so high in the canopy, so Uwe joined me on the next visit, and we managed to find a better place to get some clear photos. Our botanist who did our original flora list, Ann Moran, was able to confidently identify it from photos and descriptions. The Small-fruited Fig, *Ficus microcarpa* var. *microcarpa*. A magnificent tree emerging through the canopy formed by other trees, and beautiful small ripe orange fruit.



Both Lewin's Honeyeater and Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove were enjoying the fruit. Too late fruiting to be the tree which brought the fruit-doves, but a great discovery. There must be earlier fruits which bring the fruit-doves in.

It is quite amazing to see the variety of wildlife which appears when George puts out the motion-activated camera. There are the regulars such as the Swamp Wallabies, Possums, Brown Hares, Fawn-footed Melomys, Yellow-footed Antechinus, Lace Monitor, Eastern Whipbirds and other avifauna, but the latest additions are a micro bat, and some shots of the Water Mouse, one showing a very pregnant female. The Water Mouse was thought to have vanished from this region many years ago, but scientific investigations have proved that it is here and will do well if safeguarded. Another great reason for the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary to be preserved.



Microbat Photo: George Cowie
The head and body length is about 45 mm, it weighs less than 10 grams, the bones of its wings are equivalent to hand bones, and it gorges on insects – hopefully mosquitoes!