

## At the Sanctuary – May 2018

Robyn Howard

Red-backed Fairywrens flitted across the road in front of me, an Eastern Yellow Robin followed, Grey Fantails bounced about the low branches, butterflies skimmed gently along, a Willie Wagtail watched from the fence, the Peaceful Doves flew off to avoid the car – all of this along the roadway as I drove in. As I alighted, it was like spring all over again. The birds were active and noisy and in good numbers, plenty of butterflies and other insects, the Melaleucas were in a late flush of flowers.



The male Red-backed Fairywren led his family across the road

As I set out down the track, I stopped to observe a Grey Shrike-thrush on the pathway. It was quietly looking for food items on the ground, but three Eastern Whipbirds decided to have a bit of fun and chased it off, remaining to play a game of “chasey” amongst themselves. By the end of the month, the numbers of butterflies had almost reduced to normal levels, but it took that cold morning on the last day of the month to knock the mosquito numbers back to low levels. Their breeding had remained high because of regular rainfall, and although we did not appreciate the mosquitoes, the weather kept the whole sanctuary looking wonderful. All the vegetation looked so green and healthy and it was so lovely just to amble along.

There is an abundance of Grey Fantails, but few Rufous Fantails. At the birdbath, the Grey Fantails, Lewin’s Honeyeaters and Brown Honeyeaters seem to have arranged a schedule for their baths, with other species popping in from time to time.



As John and I left the office one day, this Grey Fantail ignored us and kept hawking for insects.

The flowering Melaleucas reminded me that we have never identified Blossom Bats in the sanctuary, so I thought I could rectify that one evening. With cooler weather, the cane toads should have been sheltering, but there were perhaps more than usual along the concrete section of the walkway. A frog was calling loudly and distinctively, so I was able to identify it as a Whirring Tree Frog (*Litoria revelata*), the species name meaning “revealed”. With such a loud call, it certainly was revealed. That is the first record for the sanctuary. Finding bats was a more difficult task than I had hoped. Searching up through the canopy and finding the flowers by torchlight was hard enough so it was no wonder I found no Blossom Bats. Daytime was a different story, and not only were the honeyeaters and butterflies visible, the honeyeaters were calling constantly. The Lewin’s, the White-throated, the Brown, and the Scarlet Honeyeaters were utilising the food provided. The Scarlet Honeyeaters are so tiny, but the male’s brilliant red, black and white plumage makes them quite visible. They also call constantly so it is generally apparent that they are around. A Pale-headed Rosella was perched on a branch with a bloom which he had broken off clutched in one foot while he worked his way along its length extracting the nectar and pollen.

In a patch of Mangrove Fern, located near where the Melaleuca Forest transitions to Casuarina Forest, a small group of Variegated Fairywrens were seeking insects. They once frequented that area, but not lately. The Red-browed Finches were also nearby, having moved from the roadsides where their seeding grasses were depleted.

A Red Swamp Dragon chose a twig of Casuarina to perch and watch for prey. When it flew, it was capable of very swift flight for a meter or so, instantly becoming stationary and maintaining that position for seconds, then flying swiftly with alternate stationary hovering, changing direction in a flash. The wing control to manage that must be amazing.





Red Swamp Dragon perched between flights

Most of the fruit of the Grey Mangroves dropped during the month, much landing on the boardwalk. Some trees out by the river retained much of their fruit. The River Mangroves are heavily in bud, but it will take several months for them to mature and bloom. They have had a peculiar year with some flowering not long completed, and some fruit on the shrubs at the same time. The Tuckeroo is also covered in buds so the little native Sugarbag Bees and the Glistening Line-blue Butterflies will be in attendance when they burst into flower.

It was great to find the new signage re-erected at both the hides. A manufacturing error on a new printer had caused the problem with the first set, but this time, the signs are looking wonderful. It is lovely to point visitors to them and see them finding some of the fauna depicted.

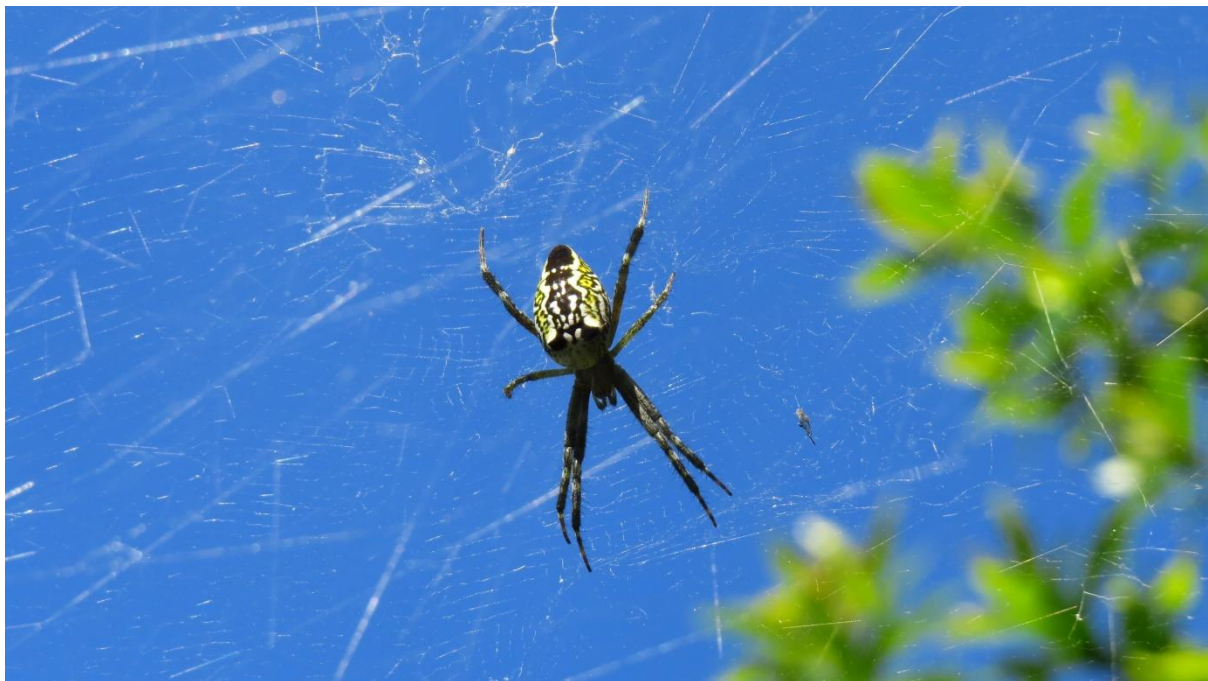
The crabs have continued to be feeding on the surface during the day, literally thousands visible at times. Their colours and their interactions and the way they feed are quite fascinating to watch. Of course, they are also a favourite food source for some of the birds and mammals, so life does have its threats.

At times, threats result in sad reality. During the month, one of the adult Water Rats was found decapitated. Particularly sad as we have had a breeding pair resident for several years at least. Of course, Water Rat life is relatively short, so the breeding pair will have actually been different animals at various stages. We can just hope that the remaining adult finds a mate very quickly. We have had a fox in the sanctuary and my inclination was to blame the fox, but another alternative was pointed out by a gentleman from the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection - a large Owl. There have been Powerful Owls at Buderim and could even be a pair closer. If so, that is natural predation.

The Azure Kingfisher has been regularly sighted near the Crab Viewing Platform. It is often its short high-pitched call which attracts my attention and I love to watch as it almost skims the water on its journey to the river. It made three stops on branches overhanging the water, but moved on each time without hunting success. The Brahminy Kite has been calling in flight also. It is breeding season for many raptors so it may be searching for food for its mate and young.

It has seemed a particularly good time for spiders, several species with egg sacs in their webs. In the Tuckerroo, a Green Tent Spider protected eggs, while lower down, a Double-tailed Tent Spider hid in its tangled web. Several Silver Orbs had webs constructed beside the boardwalk, and many species I could not identify were amongst the foliage. A most beautiful Four-spined Spider (*Gasteracantha quadrispinosa*) was at the edge of the garden. As I was leaving the forest areas, I happened to see some tiny pieces of bark move on a Macaranga leaf. On closer inspection, it was revealed to be a wee spider which hides and camouflages itself by attaching tiny pieces of vegetation to its back. The attachments are larger than the spider so there is no hope of seeing what it looks like.

This is a magnificent time of year at the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary, so plan of several visits.



Green Tent Spider in her intricate but messy web





There really is a spider under there!



Four-spined Spider at the garden edge. They did get that name right.



The Piccabeen Palm in the garden just coming into flower