

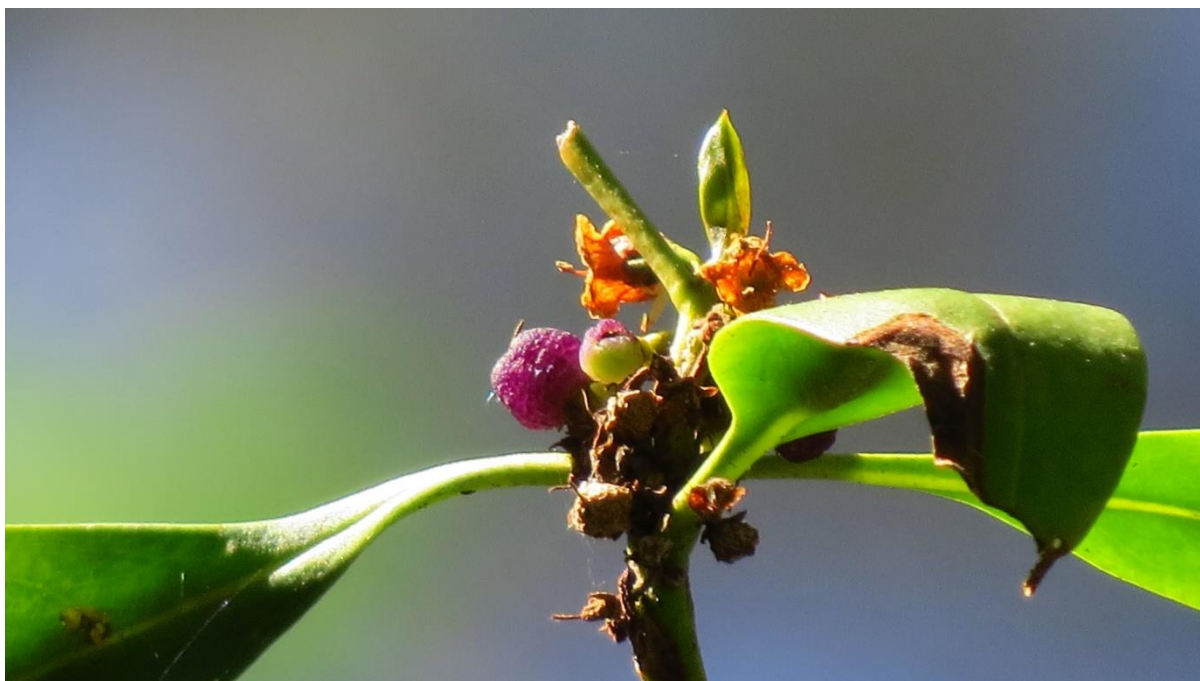
## At the Sanctuary – August 2018

Robyn Howard

August was a month of variety so far as our temperatures were concerned. Some mornings were very cold, one degree being our lowest August reading, others were quite mild, and most days were mild to warm. Unfortunately, rain seemed to pass us by, so that late in the month, the dry spell was beginning to cause leaf fall.

On one visit, three adult Australian Wood Ducks were shepherding eleven ducklings along the edge of the road, so the parents had obviously found a tree with a suitable hollow for breeding. The ducklings were only a day or two old, constantly making soft noises as they waddled along. What a family to look after! Another eight adults were in and around the dam on the left before the carpark.

Our birds have been confused about when to breed and just about every month has seen some nesting. The day that our bird observer group, along with visitors, came to the sanctuary, Barry spotted a Lewin's Honeyeater with nesting material. After careful searching some of the group was able to find where the nest was being constructed. Days later, I went back to the area but could not find the nest. However, I did watch two pairs of Australasian Figbirds and four Lewin's Honeyeaters tucking into the fruit of the Coastal Boobiallas thereabouts. The small tree has the most beautiful flowers, but I had not noticed the colourful ripe fruit in the past.



Ripe Fruit of the Coastal Boobialla. There were lots of these before the birds made a feast of them.



Male Australasian Figbird enjoying the ripe fruit of the Coastal Boobialla.

While I waited, Rufous Fantails fluttered just above the forest floor chasing insects and displaying their chestnut tones of wings and rump. They touched lightly onto the twigs and leaf litter but did not land until leaving to perch higher. The Eastern Whipbirds called loudly from amongst the ferns but just allowed glimpses of themselves. The Noisy Pittas have been in the moist forests, but the photographers who hoped for some shots went home disappointed.

Rainbow Bee-eaters have been in good numbers with 25 spotted by the bird observers. It is always easy to hear their soft “purring trill” but often not easy to find them perched high in the canopy or on the wing.

Some birds are escaping the western drought and heading for the coast. Numbers of White-necked Heron are building up, as are the Black Kites. The herons are single or in pairs and have been seen at the sanctuary, but the kites congregate, soaring in large groups. The bird observers counted twelve, but elsewhere there have been more. Several years ago, in the last severe drought, flocks of fifty to seventy were often seen.





White-necked Heron and Black Kite – both finding relief from the inland drought



In the Cheese Tree at the edge of the garden, an Olive-backed Oriole performed its routine of calls, starting in mid-canopy and gradually moving down. It is lovely to listen to its various calls and songs, and although it is a great mimic, it adhered to its own natural calls.



Olive-backed Oriole running through its repertoire

Snakes are becoming more active and a couple of Common (Green) Tree Snakes have been seen. They have been quite dark in colour, appearing black, though one was observed to have yellow on the undersides. The Red Fox has been caught on the motion camera. It is a wily creature and difficult to catch. I hate to think of our native fauna which it takes.

During the bird observer visit, one lady wanted a better look at a pupa on a Needle-leaf Mistletoe and so pulled it closer. Unfortunately, the leaves broke, so the pupa was brought up to the Visitor Centre. At the time, we were unable to identify which species it was, so Judith and Pam took it back to a similar mistletoe and re-attached it with a tie. We discovered it was a Black Jezebel, and the next time Judith went back to check on progress, she found that the butterfly had emerged successfully.



Black Jezebel pupa

Crab numbers on the mudflats were extremely low, probably because of a combination of cooler weather, low tides, and a lack of rain, but listening to the ubiquitous Brown Honeyeaters and Mangrove Gerygones, as well as the Brown Thornbills, and Shrike-thrushes still brought a great deal of pleasure.

An evening check on Large-tailed Nightjars was not very fruitful. Calls were heard from three areas, but they were just for a short period and not loud and enthusiastic, so breeding had probably not started. Listening and watching during the time when day changes to night is always lovely and can be quite a different experience each time. Sometimes it is quiet with lots of rustles, and at other times, birds call on until just after darkness takes over, and birds which were not noticed prior to sunset begin to call in the half-light.