

### **At the Sanctuary – October, 2018**

Robyn Howard

The drive, ride or walk down Sports Road is often the beginning of the enjoyment of the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary. The birds which flew low across the roadway attracted attention (but not too much) – Willie Wagtails, Eastern Yellow Robins with their bright yellow rumps, the Red-browed Finches with their bright red rumps, and this time a family of White-browed Scrubwrens bursting from the undergrowth instead of the expected Fairywrens. Birds in the canopy and those overhead are often more difficult to identify, but Australasian Figbirds were obvious. In October, the Macarangas and Syzygiums were in full flower, dropping their blossoms to form patchy pale carpets along the roadside. Last season, the Syzygiums fruited magnificently. Arrival at the car-park engenders more pleasure watching birds and listening to the birdsong, and sometimes chatting with other visitors.



As well as roadside, Red-browed Finches were also chasing insects amongst the Mangrove Ferns



Many insects were in the Mangrove Ferns, including this Passion Vine Hopper. The most interesting thing in this photo is the beautiful underside pattern of the leaflet.

Unfortunately, the rain and warmth have encouraged the breeding of mosquitoes, so it is essential to be prepared. But the weather conditions also mean new growth on the vegetation and lovely fresh clean foliage. Most Clerodendrums were vigorous, but others were late starters. Some species still have not lost their yellowing leaves from the dry times and there was considerable leaf fall even at the end of the month. The Cheese Trees are heavily in fruit, as is the Hovea. It seemed to flower quite poorly, and yet it has produced a good quantity of fruit.

The fallen flowers of the Black Bean on the walkway automatically direct the eyes upwards to search for the fresh flowers in the tree. Their gorgeous orange tones make them easy to find. Eastern Whip Birds and Golden Whistlers were vocal nearby and Lewin's Honeyeaters were supping from the flowers. None of the cicadas which could be expected in the garden were to be heard, and even in the mangrove forests they were strangely silent.





Black Bean flowers in the canopy

The River Mangroves continue to be in all stages of budding and flowering, with some even fruiting. The honey bees are certainly using their flowers, as are the Brown Honeyeaters, but the native bees must have some other source of food.



Honey Bees found a good resource in River Mangrove flowers

Bar-shouldered Doves are one of the common species at the sanctuary, and may be in varying habitats. During winter, they were more difficult to see, but not so now. They were calling in



several areas right from the car-park to the river, and even from the boardwalk in the Casuarina Forest where one disturbed bird flew up to keep a wary eye on the intruder.



Bar-shouldered Dove on Casuarina branch. Nervously watching – flight ready.

The wet mud was attracting many crabs to feed. As usual, the Orange-clawed Fiddlers were predominant, and Semaphores and Furry-clawed Crabs were in good numbers. Pacific Blue-clawed Sentinels and Red-fingered Marsh Crabs were low amongst the feeding numbers. Estuarine Slugs were very common. The tide was creeping in, the water quite turbid from the recent rains.



Special friends? Perhaps even more Estuarine Slugs very soon.





Female Furry-clawed Crab finding food particles in the mud



A popular feeding site for Orange-clawed Fiddler Crabs

Near the Crab Viewing Platform, the Grey Mangroves have had a growth spurt, with many leaning out over the waterway and thickening. It was such a beautiful spot, and the bird sounds were enthralling. It was so lovely, I decided to sit and enjoy and relax. The Sacred Kingfishers and Collared Kingfishers were both calling, but not the Azure. Mangrove Gerygones, Brown Honeyeaters, Grey Shrike-thrush, Rufous Whistler and others joined the chorus, but I did not at first recognize the soft gratings and buzzings, mixed with half-trilling warbles. The Shining Flycatcher! That little female is so lovable and entertaining! I am sure she purposely teases me, tempting me to try to photograph her then flitting off before I possibly can do so. I watched her for at least ten



minutes on the opposite bank, landing low on mangrove twigs or even the mud, settling for just short periods but remaining visible to me. Later, she moved deeper into the vegetation so I was just catching glimpses, but she kept calling so I knew where she was. Around that area seems to be her favourite spot now, but the male does not join her for long. In fact, I did not spot him at all on that day.

While she was still calling, movement overhead caught my attention. Two young Spotted Harriers soaring just above the treetops. They gently glided in a circle, changing course with wing and tail adjustments (no flapping), and then simply disappeared towards the river. Soon after, another large shape appeared above me, and contrary to my expectations of a repeat performance, it was a White-bellied Sea-Eagle, a young bird just transitioning to its adult plumage which occurs at four years of age.

Having had my fill of pleasure for the day, I was about to leave when I heard the call of the Azure Kingfisher. At bullet-like speed, it whizzed past my left ear and disappeared into the mangroves. Just letting me know it was still about, and that I was in its territory!



Grey Mangroves overhanging the waterway. Now a great spot to find the female Shining Flycatcher as well as many other birds and lots of crabs.