

At the Sanctuary – June, 2019

Robyn Howard

The Willie Wagtails were out in force, each bird doing its rhythmical dance and singing its cheery song – eight birds in all! The usual avian friends greeted visitors along the roadside – Eastern Yellow Robins, Grey Shrike-thrush, Lewin's Honeyeater, Grey Fantails – plus a Spangled Drongo and a Forest Kingfisher. Several water birds were at the road-side dam and a single Little Pied Cormorant perched unmoving above the farm dam.



This Little Pied Cormorant sat on the same branch above the dam for hours

Numerous swirling columns of wee flying insects were along the roadway and along the earlier parts of the walk – passing through them was not an appealing experience. There were both small termites and tiny flying ants. The time and conditions must have been right for both species to venture out to meet mates and commence new colonies. Perhaps the unusually warm and damp conditions contributed to their emergence.

The carpark and early part of the walkway always seem to provide good bird observations. The Striated Pardalotes were calling as it was breeding season for them, and a pair of White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes called before landing in one of the Eucalypts. They did not stay long, but were replaced by Rainbow Bee-eaters. A Noisy Friarbird and a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo chased insects while Scarlet and Brown Honeyeaters foraged for nectar. Golden Whistlers seemed more intent on chasing one another! Just below the garden, Spectacled Monarchs, Little Shrike-thrush and a Little Friarbird flitted about. As well as their usual locations in and near the Melaleuca Forest, the White-throated Treecreepers also called from within the Rainforest, while the Red-browed Finches foraged in the grass on the verges. Although it was full daylight, lots of Katydid were calling, or rather, stridulating.



A male Striated Pardalote. Calling may have been to claim a territory or to contact a mate.

The Coastal Boobialla flowered beautifully: not showily, but the flowers are just so attractive if time is taken to look closely. Rufous Fantails hid in the Mangrove Ferns, a great place to find insects. The Scrambling Clerodendrum did not know what it was supposed to be doing – it had flowers, buds, and fruit, some new growth, but the 9-Spotted Leaf Beetles were feasting on the foliage, and a Black Jezebel caterpillar was chomping away also. That was unusual as those butterflies almost invariably lay their eggs on mistletoes, especially in the mangrove areas.



The Black Jezebel larva above was photographed on another occasion on a mistletoe leaf.

White Ibis are often noticed on the mud flats looking for crabs, but a couple were disturbed on the wet ground amongst the casuarinas. They were obviously intent on their activity as they received a shock on seeing a visitor, and crashed into tree-trunks and branches in their panic to fly away.

The Estuary and Variable Mistletoes which flowered in May continued to blossom, along with the Needle-leaf Mistletoe, so the tiny honeyeaters were finding food through the Melaleuca, Casuarina and Mangrove areas where they all flourish. Mistletoebirds were present, but they were feeding on insects. A very handsome Green Tent Spider (*Cyrtophora moluccensis*) had built a web on the side of the boardwalk.



Needle-leaf Mistletoe in flower



Green Tent Spider in her web beside the boardwalk

Nearing the Bird Hide, Mangrove Gerygone song was wafting on the breeze, sweet and gentle. Beside the Bird Hide, on a Grey Mangrove overhanging the water, a Royal Spoonbill endeavoured to

get its plumage back into respectable condition. How could it get itself so grubby! Covered in mud, and the spatulate bill is not exactly designed for removing mud from plumage. It spent ages working at the task, but did not seem to make much improvement in its appearance.



No wonder the Royal Spoonbill was hiding out in the mangroves! Not a pretty sight! In the mangroves was a pair of Sacred Kingfishers, separated, but keeping contact with calls back and forth. A Grey Shrike-Thrush was singing some of its wonderful songs, but stayed hidden. The Eastern Great Egret strode purposefully along the bank, then posed stationary, waiting for an opportunity to fish. Eventually, its head darted at the water, but unsuccessfully on this occasion. A male Australasian Darter sat quietly at the end of the Crab-viewing Platform, unwilling to move unnecessarily as though it were unwell.



The male Australasian Darter. It stayed in this area for a couple of days.

Lots of molluscs fed on the surface of the wet mud, and as is often the case at the right time of the tides, the banks were home to hundreds and hundreds of feeding crabs. A single male Yellow-clawed Fiddler and a Sunburst Fiddler were on the surface, along with the more common Orange-clawed Fiddlers, Maroon Mangrove Crabs, Furry-clawed Crabs, Red-fingered Marsh Crabs, Semaphore Crabs, etc.



Male Sunburst Fiddler Crab scooping mud to extract food on the surface

On the return towards the car-park, there was movement in the Mangrove Fern beside the beginning of the long loop of the boardwalk. It took patience to really identify the creatures as they kept mostly well hidden, with just the fronds moving. Finally, a Rufous Fantail became visible, and then the male Shining Flycatcher, but just for a second. More waiting, and then the female Shining Flycatcher flashed out into the open then back, but at least she repeated the flight a few times. This is almost as far from the river as they venture and it is always a real thrill to have a sighting of them.



Spangled Drongo hiding in foliage



This Lewin's Honeyeater behaved more like a treecreeper!



What a grub! It really was no wonder this bird did not want to be seen!