

## At the Sanctuary – March, 2017

Robyn Howard

In March, we went from desperately dry to receiving some decent rain. Originally it was patchy in dispersal, with the wetlands missing most of the good falls, but eventually it did happen! It was great to walk through and see the fresh leaves on so many shrubs, vines and trees. One species of Leaf Beetle was thoroughly appreciating the new greenery, and there were dozens of them paired up and mating. Obviously, we will shortly have huge numbers of Nine-spotted Leaf Beetles (*Phyllocharis cyanicornis*). The only plant they were utilising was the Scrambling Clerodendrum (*Clerodendrum inerme*).

The remnants of Cyclone Debbie brought heavy rains to the area, but it also brought strong and gusty winds. With so many trees having died in the drought, I expected the winds would cause quite a degree of damage. On my first visit, I found lots of small branches down along the road and in the garden, with a large acacia down across the concrete portion at the commencement of the track. A phone call to the Sunshine Coast Council brought a quick response, the arborist removing the acacia and checking the remainder of the boardwalk. Lots of twigs and branches had come down, but much of the fallen timber was dead wood. A couple of large living Casuarinas in the Melaleuca Forest had fallen sideways and lodged against other trees. A number of plants had been pushed to odd angles, but not actually fallen. As with areas outside the sanctuary, several trees were broken off at a height of one to four metres. Tides were above normal levels owing to the amount of flood in the river, and the inundation was turbid. Fish swam amongst the pneumatophores but were difficult to detect.

The cicadas are greatly reduced in numbers, but even at the end of the month, Black Prince, Flourey Baker, and Mangrove Cicadas were calling, as were the Katydid, and numbers of other insects had increased. The rain and insects may have encouraged a late nesting for the birds. I did not see any nesting activity (though I have at other sites), but the Grey Fantails had a couple of young birds requesting to be fed. Many of the summer visitors such as the Eastern Koels have already left on their northern journeys, but Cicadabirds are still active in the area. Shorebirds are changing to their breeding plumage and will soon start their challenging migration to the northern hemisphere.

On an early evening walk with Judith and Carol, we were able to observe some of the crabs which did not go rushing down their burrows. The tide was encroaching, and Judith pointed out the first of 3 Common Pike Eels. They seem to remain in the river during the daytime, but explore the mudflats in the evening and night. There have been high numbers of Striped Toadfish and some Common Toadfish, but less than usual numbers of Spotted Scat. Mudskippers have continued to be seen in their favourite localities. Across the river, the strange cry of the Bush Stone-Curlew carried on the evening air.

A huge Lace Monitor strolled slowly across the car-park and mounted the bank on the far side of the road. He acted as though he was king of this area, and nobody should mess with him. He was probably right, but I enjoyed seeing the Keelback a little further down the hill on the roadside. It is a non-venomous snake, and can eat small cane toads with no ill effects. Above the forest, the plaintive cry of the Brahminy Kites drew attention. It is just about time for some of our raptors to start their breeding cycle, and this pair was ready for an early start. The deep contrast of their white and chestnut plumage is magnificent.



Fallen Acacia blocking the beginning of the walk



This Brown Cuckoo-Dove watched as I cleared the debris from the bird-bath



Paper Wasp (*Ropalidia romandi*) nest damaged by the rain and gusting winds



Fresh new leaves on the Scrambling Clerodendrum after the earlier rain



One of the Nine-Spotted Leaf Beetles which fed on the new growth and mated.