

At the Sanctuary – July, 2017

Robyn Howard

What a grand choice it was to spend a couple of hours on a winter morning taking a gentle stroll along the boardwalk of the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary.

Cheery birdsong sounded as I opened the car door in the parking area, and continued throughout my visit. The sun quickly cleared the nip from the air with the birds often choosing high branches to catch those early rays. A Little Shrike-Thrush in the garden and an unseen Grey Shrike-Thrush in the forest conducted a vocal duel, but when two more Little Shrike-Thrushes arrived to join in, the battle was over. Regardless, both species have glorious songs. Out near the river, the male Rufous Whistler sang constantly, the songs used in breeding season to establish and maintain a territory. He must have had a nest there, but I was unable to find it.

One of the many plants blossoming out of season has been the Coastal Boobialla (*Myoporum acuminatum*). It is such a beautiful delicate flower for a small tree. The majority of Grey Mangroves had dropped most of their fruit (lots landing on the boardwalk) but a few trees were still heavy with their fruit. The Mangrove Ferns have developed spore, ready to be dispersed on the wind once mature. The Sugarbag Bees (stingless and native) found the flowers on the Tuckeroo near the riverbank. Three species of Mistletoe (Estuary, Mangrove and Swamp Oak Mistletoes) have improved their flowering and the smaller honeyeaters availed themselves of the bounty.

Insects were abundant considering the time of year. The Nine-spotted Leaf Beetles have been voraciously consuming leaves and mating, the Praying Mantids and Katydid are plentiful, and several species of fly are present, including the lovely orange one which Deb photographed for her Questagame entry.

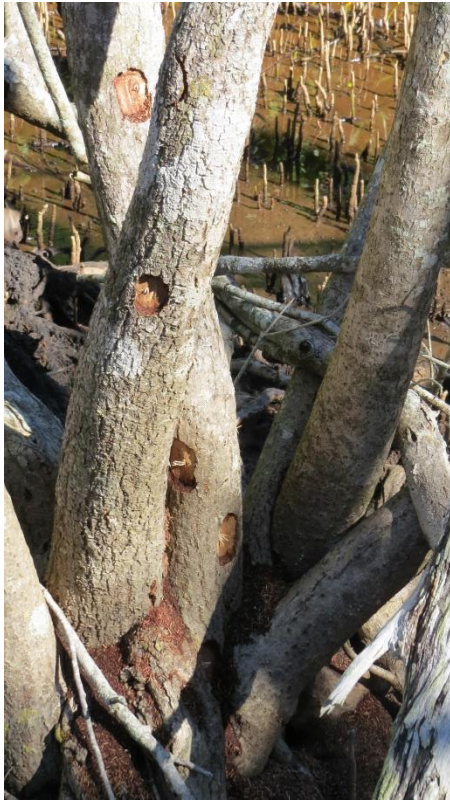
Crabs are still busily feeding between tides – always hundreds of Orange-clawed Fiddlers, along with Furry-clawed Crabs, Maroon Mangrove Crabs, Pacific Blue-clawed Sentinels, Red-fingered Marsh Crabs, etc. Purple and Cream Shore Crabs have been strangely absent, as have a few species of Fiddler Crab. I did eventually find a Sunburst Fiddler, but it was a strange colour form which I cannot recall having seen in the past.

We have at least two species of Mudskippers in the sanctuary, and I have at last identified the most common one of them. [Barred Mudskipper – *Periophthalmus argentilineatus*] People often overlook them but find their activities interesting and even amusing when they are pointed out. (We posted a short video on the Facebook page.)

Carole and I took another group of ten on a guided walk early in the month, mostly locals. They could hardly believe they have had such a treasure virtually on their doorsteps for so long without discovering it. The sanctuary has now been added to their list of attractions to show future visitors.

From time to time (probably annually), I notice particular insect damage on dead tree trunks. It appears to be some type of borer, but it obviously works extremely hard! The thick bark is removed in an oval about 6 cm long, the exposed timber is scraped off to a depth of a couple of millimetres, then a “church window” shape within that area is dug out more deeply. A hole is bored in the

window and fibrous material left protruding from that hole. The ground is littered with the removed fibrous material. Without seeing the larva or pupa, the museum was unable to identify the culprit, but suggested it would be either a weevil or longicorn beetle. Quite fascinating.



Bark removed and holes (with their fibrous plug) bored in dead Milky Mangroves by beetle larvae



Sunburst Fiddler (male) with non-standard colouring



Coastal Boobialla blossom



Fresh spore on the Mangrove Fern



Nine-spotted Leaf Beetles – ensuring the continuation of their species!



Scrambling Clerodendrum showing the results of feeding by the Nine-spotted Leaf Beetles



Barred Mudskipper – commonly found on our mudflats at the water's edge