

## Visit to Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary – 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2014

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I cannot resist the allure of the wetlands on the extreme high tides, and thought this may be my last opportunity for several months to experience the wonders of the sanctuary. The boardwalk upgrade was due to commence. It had been really windy for maybe a week (cyclone Dylan was in the north) and rain had been threatening, or promising, but little was falling in the area. The tide was so high, (probably higher than scheduled because of the northern low,) that water had crept up as far as the footings of the newest boardwalk. The aura at the sanctuary was subtly different from the usual, but one thing that does not change is the cheery melodies of the Brown Honeyeaters which continued from the car-park to the river.

Small birds were evident, especially the Brown Thornbills, as I set out. Amongst many calls, their lovely trill is quite diagnostic for identification. Both male and female Golden Whistlers, Eastern Yellow Robins, and Varied Trillers were above the concrete pathway. A couple of White-throated Treecreepers were seeking insects in the bark of *Casuarina glauca* and Paperbark trees, and singing loudly. While I was stopped finding the first treecreeper, I realized I was hearing the call of the Tusked Frog (*Adelotus brevis*), the first I had heard there in years. Cicadas were quiet until I reached the mangroves where the Black Princes were chorusing so loudly that it was difficult to pick out the White Drummers also calling.

The Mangrove Fern was developing its spore – some frond ends just beginning to colour and others really brown. Rustling in the ferns drew my attention to a Northern Brown Bandicoot which may have been disturbed by water reaching its daytime roost, or perhaps it forgot it is supposed to be nocturnal! River Mangroves have been fruiting prolifically and the Grey Mangroves are in flower. The Orange Mangroves have dropped most of their hypocotyls and are now in bud again. Mangroves further from the river were suffering from the dry and experiencing leaf-loss, especially the Milky Mangroves. The mistletoe, *Amyema congener*, was an uncharacteristic bright green relief with its red and yellow flowers creating a beautiful contrast.

At the far crab hide, there were a few unusual tiny fish which I did not recognize. I want to call them juvenile bullrouts, but I am far from confident about that. They were very dark, slightly mottled, about 15 mm long with extremely broad large heads, tapering to fine tails. Whereas other fish swam at various depths, these seemed to hug the bottom and were quite sluggish. The Striated Heron flew by silently just above the water and disappeared into the mangroves.

Three Spangled Drongos cackled and played around the canopy as I progressed towards the pontoon. A couple of Rufous Fantails added lovely colour as well as their song, and Whistling Kites contributed their calls. Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were on a rare visit to this area. The Bar-sided Skink was still occupying its regular hollow and kept a wary eye on me but did not hide. Once the tide had receded sufficiently, thousands of crabs appeared to feed on the surface. Many, many really tiny ones and amongst the larger specimens, Purple and Cream Shore Crabs and Scarlet Three-spined Mangrove Crabs predominated.

As I started the return journey, I heard Variegated Fairy-wrens in the casuarinas opposite the crab hide, so I felt compelled to go and locate them. This is an unusual spot to find them, but on the way back, I also found them near the end of the old narrow boardwalk in a fairly dense Orange Mangrove stand and in nearby Mangrove Ferns. I had not noticed them so deeply into the mangroves in the past. It is not typical habitat for them, but it was certainly lovely to see them, especially the male with his metallic blue, bright chestnut, black, brown and white plumage.



Varied Triller



White-throated Treecreeper (Female)  
Photo: Birdlife Aust



Tusked Frog (*Adelotus brevis*) Photo: Qld Govt EHP



White Drummer (*Arunta perulata*)



Variable Mistletoe (*Amyema congener*)



Variegated Fairy-wren (Male)  
Photo: Glen Fergus