

At the Sanctuary – 5th July, 2014

Robyn Howard

How wonderful to have full access to the boardwalks again, and on such a glorious day. The new boardwalk is great. So many folk visiting and chatting as they discovered this asset, all with positive reports of their experiences on the day. As one lady described it to me – “a very special place”.

As I arrived, I was greeted as usual by that beautiful sound of birdsong, and several of those responsible soon made themselves apparent. In the garden were Eastern Yellow Robin, Lewin’s Honeyeater and Grey Fantail, and at the beginning of the track were three Spectacled Monarchs, some Brown Gerygones, and Brown Honeyeaters. Mistletoebirds were common along the whole walk, doing four of their differing calls. It was surprising to see so many as there seemed to be no mistletoes with fruit. Grey Shrike-thrushes gave their strikingly beautiful calls from several spots along the walk, as did the Golden Whistlers. Four Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos flew over with at least one of them giving a juvenile call. The Rufous Whistler, which is normally seen out by the river, was occupying a group of casuarinas near the beginning of the mangrove area. As I was peering into those trees, I saw some movement so took up my binoculars and spotted the White-throated Nightjar on a low branch. (Unfortunately amongst too much foliage, so no photo.) Below it, two Bar-shouldered Doves were moving on the ground, so were perhaps the reason for its disturbance.

In all the forest types, the vegetation was looking green and healthy, far better than when I had last been able to visit in the dry and heat at the end of January. The Grey Mangroves are in heavy fruit, the River Mangroves with plenty of bud, and the Orange Mangroves must have been disturbed by the odd seasons. Many trees had plenty of buds, lots had already flowered (and a few actually had flowers still in the calyx), some had small hypocotyls forming, some hypocotyls were half-grown and others almost fully formed. The Barbed-wire Vine (*Smilax australis*) had lovely bunches of black fruit, whilst the Berry Saltbush (*Einadia hastata*) had small clusters of tiny red fruit. Coastal Boobialla (*Myoporum acuminatum*) was displaying its delicate white blossoms with mauve spots, a plant worth stopping to look at closely. The Scrambling Clerodendrum (*Clerodendrum inerme*) was in flower. This species suffered in the dry heat, and its flower production reflects this fact. The blossom is white and tubular with four purplish long stamens. The length of the tube this season is about half the normal length, and similarly with many stamens, but there was still a good showing of flowers.

Large numbers of molluscs (not identified at the time) were on the mudflats, especially in the area enclosed by the boardwalks to the far crab hide. The Marine Couch (*Sporobolus virginicus*) is beginning a slow recovery in that same area, and is looking great elsewhere.

As is typical in cooler weather, thousands of tiny crabs were feeding, but low numbers of larger crabs such as the fiddlers and Maroon Mangrove Crabs. The cool weather also meant that butterflies were not active and few insects or spiders could be found.

As I was out on the pontoon, a family of four with whom I had spoken earlier arrived. The lad had picked up a dead leaf along the way and let it drift from his fingers into the river.

Immediately, a group of about eight Fantailed Mullet swam up to the surface, splashing as they tried to retrieve what they expected to be food!



Fruit of the Barbed-wire Vine (*Smilax australis*)



Spectacled Monarch – Photo J J Harrison (Wikipedia)



Grey Shrike-thrush – about 25 cm – on Grey Mangrove branch. A plain bird with a glorious song



Scrambling Clerodendrum flowers (formed with shortened tube)



Coastal Boobialla