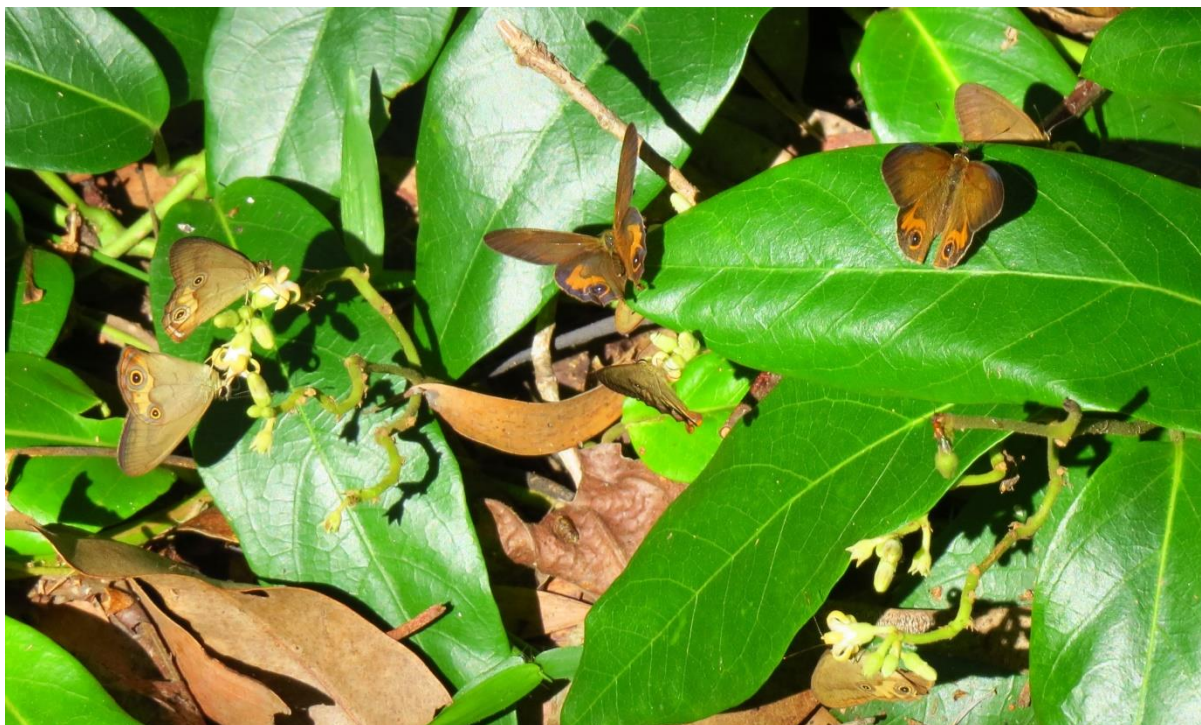


At the Sanctuary – April, 2018

Robyn Howard

April was a transition time, going from summer-like heat and humidity to the more temperate weather of autumn. Our summer visiting birds left, either before or during April, and some of our winter visitors arrived. During March, I had not recorded a single Grey Fantail, (though it is quite likely that others may have seen one or two,) but late in April, I suddenly found eleven. It seemed like an invasion! The Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves were calling early in the month but not by the end. As expected, the numbers of cicadas decreased during March and early April, so that by the end of the month, I heard none. One noticeable difference from the anticipated numbers was the butterflies, especially the small ones which love the area beside the concrete section of the walk. As near as I could count with all the fidgety flights, I found 23 Brown Ringlets within a distance of about a metre and a half (they were attending a flowering *Parsonsia straminea* at ground level,) and a further 24 scattered along the adjoining 30 metres. With them were several varieties of Skippers and Grass-darts.



At least 7 Brown Ringlet Butterflies in about 20 cm on *Parsonsia*

On different days, various fauna and flora attracted attention. One day seemed to be Golden Whistler day, with males in their beautiful garb of golden-yellow, black and white flitting around in the garden, the rainforest, and the melaleucas, plus a couple of less colourful females. On a separate occasion, it was Red-fingered Marsh Crab day. Nobody told them they are supposed to be nocturnal, and they were out feeding in numbers, often with about ten in close proximity. On that day, the light seemed unusual and enhanced the orange tones of some of the crabs with a fluorescent glow.



The orange tones on the female Orange-clawed Fiddler seemed to glow

The Grey Mangroves have been fruiting and dropping fruit whilst still tiny though some have attained full size. Some trees did not fruit at all. The Mangrove Fern again has spore. The Scrambling Clerodendrum produced a light flowering (of poor quality), even though the Nine-spotted Leaf Beetles had continued to wreak havoc on their foliage. After all the times I have seen this leaf beetle, I found larvae for the first time. Unlike some insects, the larvae reflect the colours of the adults.



Nine-spotted Leaf-Beetle – Larva and adult

Several of the mistletoes, mostly Variable Mistletoe and Needle-leaf Mistletoe, were in flower.



Flowering Needle-leaf Mistletoe (*Amyema cambagei*)

Not far past the crab-viewing platform, I was fortunate enough to hear the high-pitched call of the Azure Kingfisher and watched it fly low from upstream of the platform right to where the waterway joins the river. It flew swiftly, and at the end of the flight, it dived into the water and came up with a small fish. I can't see how it could possibly have sighted such a tiny object in the water from that distance. However, when I was out by the pontoon, a Little Egret flew across the river to the shallow water near the bank and immediately started fishing. A school of bait fish must have been creating sufficient disturbance to attract their attention.



This Little Egret flew in and immediately had success hunting fish

The birds were lovely, with small birds in most sections. Roadside, a couple of Double-barred Finches were visiting, along with the resident Bar-shouldered Doves, Peaceful Doves, and Red-browed Finches. In the garden and early part of the walk, the Silvereyes, Varied Trillers, Spectacled Monarchs, and Little Shrike-thrush predominated. Through the forests, Eastern Whipbirds seemed anxious to advertise their presence, White-browed Scrubwrens kept low in the shrubs and Mangrove Ferns, while Brown Gerygone, Brown Thornbill, White-throated Treecreeper, Mistletoebirds and Lewin's and Brown Honeyeaters occupied the canopy. In the mangroves, the Shining Flycatcher, Mangrove Gerygones, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Collared Kingfisher and Brahminy Kite were present.



Photo: Allan Sonerson. White-browed Scrubwren in low bushes

Looking up when the light is fading in the carpark can be rewarding. Small birds gather by the dozens, some just gliding, perhaps knowing there are insects available at that time of day. It is

probably the final time for the day when they may catch a snack, or they may just be gathering to settle communally for the night. It is impossible to accurately count the numbers of each species, but Welcome Swallows, Fairy Martins and White-breasted Woodswallows are all well represented.

Late one afternoon, Lisa (from Sunshine Coast Council), Judith and I traversed the boardwalk to the hides to select positions for our awaited signs. They were installed, but unfortunately did not stand up to the weather, so the manufacturer is replacing them. They really looked great and a group from the “Blue Laguna” boat trip were very impressed by their beauty and relevance. Fortunately, the problem was discovered very quickly and reported by George.



Visitors from the Blue Laguna enjoy the signage and the crabs. (The sun on the near photo detracts from its beauty, but it is a beautiful sign. It will be great when they are replaced.)

As daylight fades is a lovely time to be in the sanctuary. Everything is gently changing and a different atmosphere ensues, different creatures make noises and even the vegetation appears somehow softer. As we walked along through the Melaleuca Forest, we disturbed a microbat from just above our heads. It must have spent the day asleep in a group of large dead leaves and begun to stir for the evening as we approached, stirring it into flight.

As part of our programme for later in the year, we are planning to do an evening walk in an endeavour to discover which microbats we have resident in the different forests. That is really an event to savour, and a wonderful opportunity to learn.