

At the Sanctuary – December 2018 and January 2019

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Our summers seem to be including more hot days year by year, and the lack of rain has been exacerbated by the heat. Birds have been seeking shade but are still panting, so the Wilf Harris bird bath has been well used. The reptiles have been very active with Carpet Pythons, Common (Green) Tree Snakes, and Lace Monitors seen regularly. One of the sloughed Carpet Python skins was that of a juvenile, and it was surprising to see how tiny the scales are. The specimen will go into our display cabinet when possible.

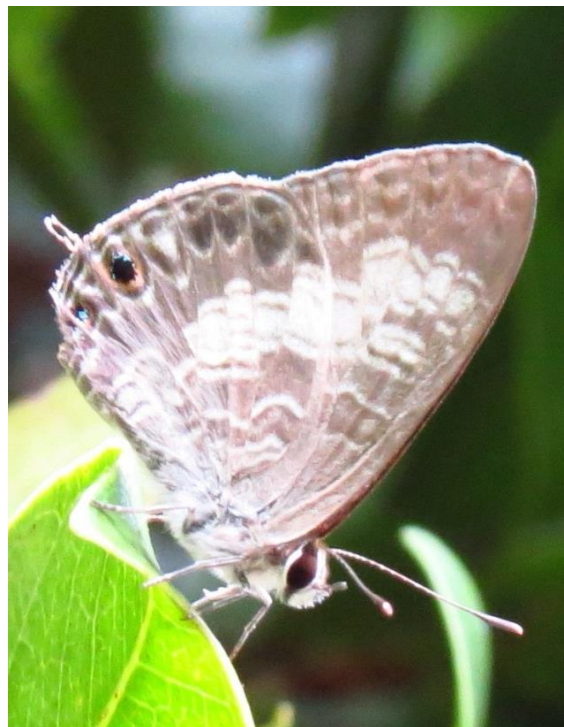


Common Tree Snake on boardwalk – just making sure there was no need to move

If there is one thing which proves summer has arrived, it is the sounds of our cicadas. At times, it has been almost deafening from the garden to the river, the mix of sounds changing with progress through differing vegetation. Besides the more common species, we have had Clangers, Paperbark Cicadas, and Sprinkler Squeakers which make sounds like the old-style sprinklers used in parks. Other insects have also been active – beetles, dragonflies, bees, and butterflies, which included Tailed Emperor, Blue Triangle, Scarlet and Black Jezebels, Swamp Tigers, Common Pencil Blue [6 flying together], Common Crow, Varied Eggfly, Lemon Migrant, Orchard Swallowtail, White-banded Line-blue and more. Although there was no rain, both Green Tree Frogs and Eastern Sedge Frogs were calling during the day, and 8 young Sedge Frogs hid in a Lomandra beside the track.



This Anthelid Moth stayed in the open even during the day



A Common Pencil Blue and a White-banded Line-blue – both relatively small butterflies

Mammals, mostly identified from the motion-activated camera, included Northern Brown Bandicoot, Long-nosed Bandicoot, Water Mouse, Common Brushtail Possum, Short-eared Brushtail Possum, and two introduced species, the Brown Hare and Red Fox. The Common Brushtail Possums must have been very active near the ballroom as I found fifteen sets of droppings on the boardwalk.



Common Brushtail Possum – Photo: Sue Lee

Bird observing has been profitable. Tiny newborn Brush Turkey chicks were seen in every month from August to January. It is surprising that the breeding season has lasted so long. Because the Pink Euodia was blooming strongly, lots of Scarlet Honeyeaters were enjoying the nectar as well as the Brown Honeyeaters. They are always throughout the sanctuary, but on one occasion, 14 were in the carpark. Occasionally one or two Striated Herons may be spotted amongst the mangroves, but on one walk, a juvenile was flushed 3 times. There were either two or three birds. Their alarm call is different from the adult's, and not an attractive sound. The Emerald Dove has remained in the rainforest with Bar-shouldered Doves, Brown Cuckoo-Doves, Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves, Peaceful Doves and Crested Pigeons in other locations.



The immature Striated Heron is even more beautiful than the adult. That green skin!

Silvereyes had not been plentiful for months, but they have returned to the garden (where they enjoy the bath) and the Melaleuca Forest. Spectacled Monarchs and White-throated Treecreepers share an area at the verges of the rainforest, along with Golden Whistlers, Eastern Yellow Robins and Rufous Fantails. Grey Fantails are to be found in any of the habitats. Rainbow Bee-eaters, Shining Bronze-Cuckoos, and Little Black Cormorants are common visitors. 24 Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos were present on one day as were 2 Cicadabirds which are seen less commonly. Some of the raptors were down by the river, their favourite hangout. One of the White-bellied Sea-Eagles was in partial moult, transitioning to its plumage for the following year, but the moult was so strange, it was not possible to ascertain whether it was changing from 1st to 2nd year, or 2nd to 3rd year – just that it was not progressing to adult.

One bird I had not seen at the sanctuary for a couple of years was the Buff-banded Rail, so I was surprised to firstly see a little black fluff-ball for a second, then hear high-pitched squeaks, then glimpse an adult bird. The squeaks were apparently alarm calls from the adult who was distressed by the precocious baby breaking cover. Moving back and forth along the boardwalk failed to reveal them again. It was very fortuitous to have had those glimpses. The chick moved so quickly for such a tiny creature and simply melted into the undergrowth.



Buff-banded Rail Photo: Aviceda

The Scrambling Clerodendrum sprouted new leaves and even some flowers. The Estuarine Mistletoe flowered well providing more sustenance for the small honeyeaters. The Mangrove Fern continued to look fresh and healthy and was strongly producing spore. Along the roadside, there were plenty of seeding grasses, but no finches were visible. It was possible they were feeding early in the mornings or late afternoon.



The Scrambling Clerodendrum was not in full flower, but they were still lovely

The mangroves were looking good. The Orange Mangroves had a mixture of buds, flowers, and hypocotyls. The Stilt-Rooted Mangroves carried buds and flowers but had a wonderful coverage of hypocotyls produced last season, the best ever. The River Mangroves were fruiting heavily, but the buds which had appeared out of season must have fallen without progressing to blossom. Milky Mangroves were fruiting, and the Grey Mangroves followed their period of budding with the beginning of summer flowering.



The Stilt-rooted Mangroves have never borne so many hypocotyls (fruit) at the sanctuary



Generous fruiting on the female Milky Mangroves



The first flowers opening on the Grey Mangrove

Some crab sightings were interesting. While trying to take photos one day, patience was rewarded by the appearance of a Ward's Hairy-legged Crab, a Green Swimming Crab, and a couple of tiny Mud Crabs – one about 40 mm, and the other about 60 mm. The water in the drainage channel was so

murky that photography was not successful. When the really high tides were due, they did not eventuate to the predicted level. The depth was too shallow for the anticipated Spotted Scat to be swimming over the mudflats, but when the tide was on the ebb, the area beside the crab viewing platform provided wonderful variety which included great numbers of Purple and Cream Shore Crabs, several Three-spined Mangrove Crabs, and eight *Sarmatium germaini*, the last rarely seen above ground. The wet mud after the freshly receded tide always proves excellent for feeding crabs.



The *Sarmatium germaini* grows to 60 mm across its carapace and has interesting colouration



Purple and Cream Shore Crabs mating. Over 30 others of this species were nearby