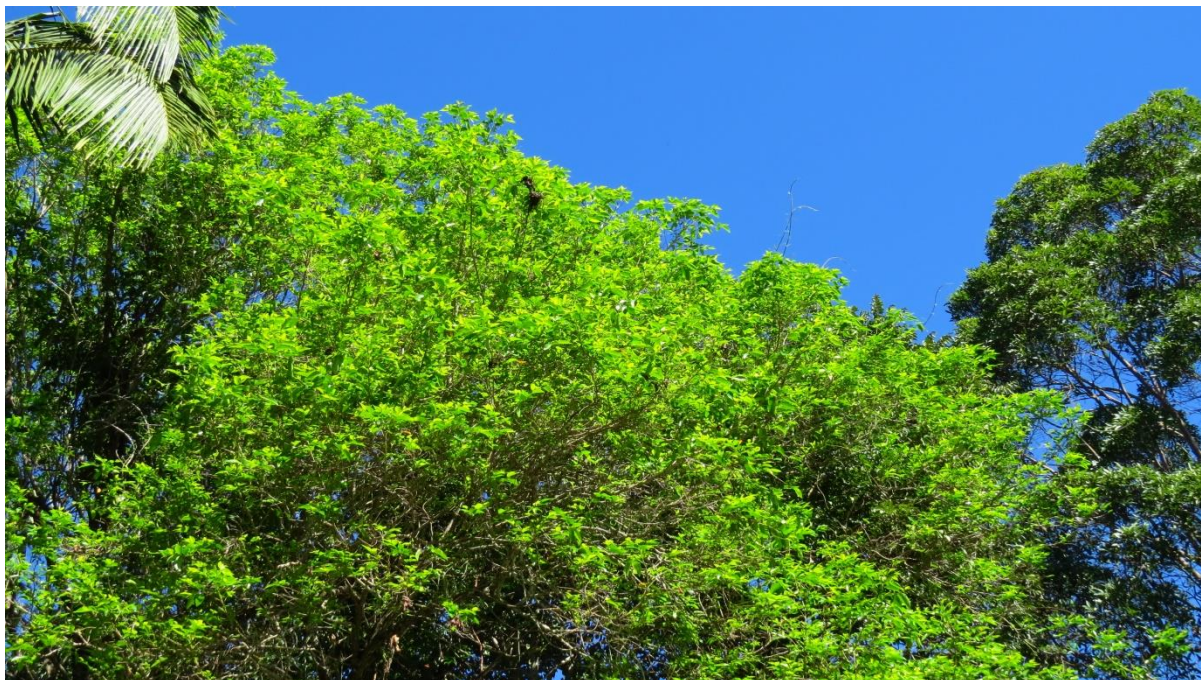


## At The Sanctuary – March 2019

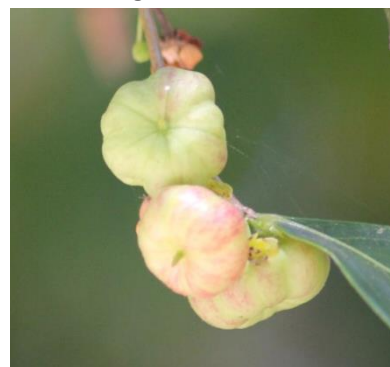
Robyn Howard

The long, hot, dry period finally took its toll on the trees, vines and shrubs at the sanctuary, and it was sad to see the results. Several Supplejack vines which reached well up into the canopy were completely dead although their roots were in soil which is usually permanently damp. The Climbing Maidenheads were looking poorly and even the Barbed-wire Vines were obviously stressed. The Clerodendrums and Milky Mangroves had suffered leaf-yellowing and dropping as did the Melaleucas, so that the boardwalks were heavily covered in dead leaves. Death had occurred for some Milky Mangroves, Casuarinas and Acacias.

When volunteering, Carole and Uwe noticed sudden severe leaf drop from a Cheese Tree beside the beginning of the concrete section of the walk. It was a long-established specimen which often drew the attention of visitors, especially when fruiting (the cheeses) or when moth larvae built numerous webs amongst its foliage. It was a great tree and well worth trying to save so a good drink of water was provided in an endeavor to sustain its life. Success! Good follow-up rains had the tree showing its appreciation with a burst of new leaves before the end of the month. Nature can be quite resilient if given half a chance.



The beautiful light green foliage of the Cheese Tree is the fresh growth after a good drink!



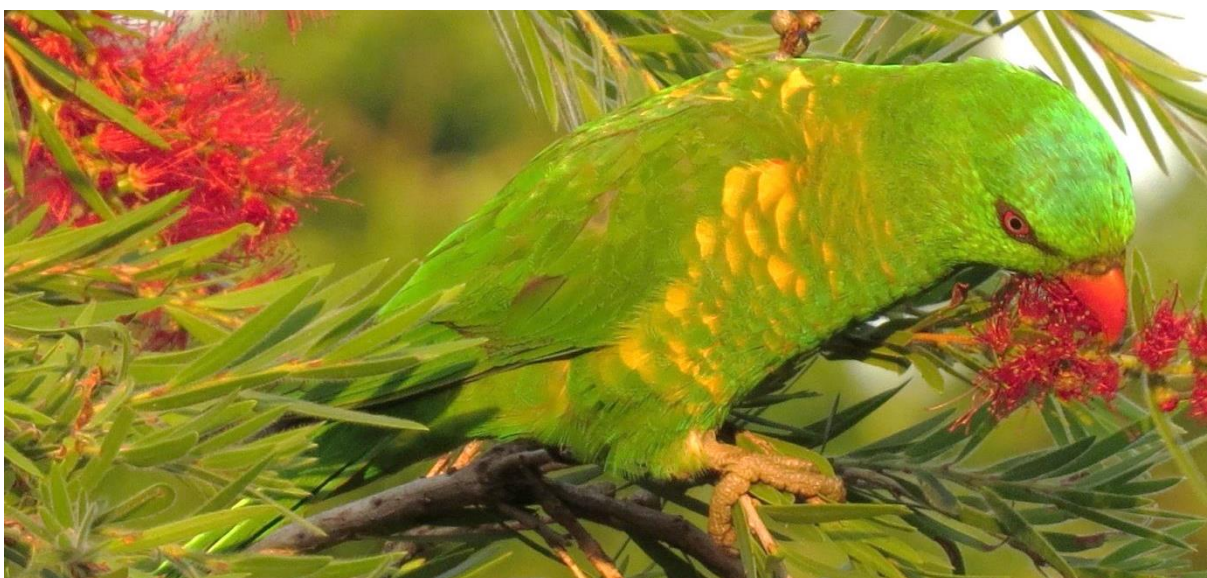
The "cheeses" were photographed in fruiting season – September.

Smaller birds were more prevalent than the larger species. At last, the Red-browed Finches had returned – nine in the seeding grasses along the roadside and four in the gardens. Silvereyes were again active in the carpark and Melaleuca Forest. As they sometimes do, the Melaleucas flowered over several weeks. Individual trees only blossomed for short periods, but then others began to flower and so it went on, resulting in small numbers of trees providing resources over about two months.



Red-browed Finch amongst the seeding grasses

Lewin's Honeyeaters, Eastern Yellow Robins, White-browed Scrubwrens, and Eastern Whipbirds always frequent the first half of the track, but in the late afternoon, many Rainbow Lorikeets, along with a smaller number of Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, visited or overflew the sanctuary on their way back to their nighttime roosts.



Scaly-breasted Lorikeet in the garden

In the open area towards the end of the Casuarina Forest, where there are collapsing dead casuarinas, lots of Red-fingered Marsh Crabs scuttled amongst the dead and decaying roots. The majority were females, dark and well disguised against the mud. Purple and Cream Shore Crabs were also out feeding there.



Only her more brightly-coloured chelae make her stand out in the mud

In the mangrove forests, some trees were looking healthy, but others were not coping well. Some Milky Mangroves had lost a high percentage of leaves, but other female trees had produced fresh buds and flowers. Generally, the Sugarbag Bees, the stingless native social bees, absolutely congregate all over the blossoms, but not a single bee was to be found. Perhaps in dire circumstances, the flowers were not producing the nectar and pollen which should have been the attractants. The Grey Mangroves which had such a wonderful flowering earlier in the year were deficient in fruit. Maybe some will still develop, but none were evident at the time.



The flowers of the female Milky Mangrove are tiny, but the bees usually find them.  
Not a single bee of any species was present.

On the edges of the river, a Little Egret and a couple of White-faced Herons stood almost knee-deep in water waiting for movement of aquatic creatures. Their patience was eventually rewarded and their darting movements indicated that something was within reach.

The Tuckeroos were wilting. They would be considered amongst the hardiest local tree species, but the constant heat and lack of rain was affecting them badly. Even some mistletoes were dying. When trees are stressed, they have a capacity to deny resources to branches where mistletoes are hemi-parasitic. Mistletoes photosynthesize, but depend on their host for moisture and other nutrients. Obviously, some host trees had reached their limits and implemented this strategy to ensure their own survival. The tree may lose a branch, but it lives to fight on.

The journey back to the car-park in the late afternoon was under overcast skies, dark clouds and a build-up of storm-like clouds. Unfortunately, at that time, any rain bypassed Bli Bli.

Back in the Melaleuca Forest, the Four-coloured Milk-vine Bugs had appeared on the Mangrove Vines. From time to time, they may be noticed in that area, but rarely anywhere else in the sanctuary. With colouring such as theirs, it is likely that it is an indication to birds, reptiles and any other predators, that they are toxic or at best distasteful.



The Four-coloured Milk-Vine Bug (*Oncopeltus sordidus*) seen in our Melaleuca Forest

As dusk settled, a loud electronic type of noise pierced the air around the garden and carpark. Late in the season, but no mistaking those shrill ear-splitting sounds of the Bottle Cicadas. They only generate sound for about twenty minutes at dusk, so it was fortunate to be there at the right time.



The Bottle Cicada was located by his loud call

Later, the Southern Boobook quietly called his “mo-poke” rhythmically from an unseen perch. Just softly announcing his presence in his territory before going to hunt. Although it was so dry, hundreds of Cane Toads spread themselves along the bitumen road, and a few tiny frogs performed gigantic high leaps to achieve their road crossing.

Most interestingly, a small number of Little Red Flying-foxes flew over. The Melaleucas were not flowering in a manner sufficient to entice them in their tens of thousands as they arrive in their migrations. Some Little Reds were seen in other places on the coast, but the dry weather probably disturbed the production of their normal food resources thus discouraging normal migratory movements. They are a nomadic species and depend on following seasonal flowering both inland and on our coasts.



During the day, Little Red Flying-Foxes pack closely together in camps. It is the smallest of our three local Flying-Foxes, and as with the others, is essential to the pollination of some of our native trees.