



Education

ANNETTE COOK

Gunbower Primary School student flies an owl kite. Photo: Annette Cook

FORESTS AND WETLANDS

This year, 2011, has been declared the International Year of Forests. According to the United Nations website, forests cover 31% of Earth's total land mass and support 80% of its terrestrial biodiversity. As well as providing habitat for plants and animals, forests are also home to 300 million people, while 1.6 billion people rely on forests for their livelihood. Forests contributed \$327 billion to world trade in 2004. It seems that whatever way you look at it forests are key to the survival of living things on Earth.

Water is another essential ingredient for life. The importance of wetlands in the water cycle is celebrated each year on 2 February, World Wetlands Day. The theme for 2011 acknowledges the International Year of Forests by having the theme of Forests and Wetlands. In *The Bird Observer* we have discussed the importance of wetlands for River Red Gum forests. River Red Gums have the widest distribution of all eucalypts in Australia and illustrate well the link between wetlands and forests, but several other trees can also be associated with wetlands: paperbarks and mangroves spring easily to mind but consider also casuarinas and palms. For more information about forested wetlands a fact sheet can be downloaded at http://www.wetlandcare.com.au/fact_sheets.asp.

World Wetlands Day is of particular importance in 2011 because it is 40 years since the Ramsar Convention was signed. The Australian Wetland Alliance urges us to celebrate it at any time during the year. To find out more about the Ramsar Convention visit www.ramsar.org where you can download a commemorative book *Ramsar's Liquid Assets: 40 Years of the Convention on Wetlands*.

Some excellent wetland education resources have been developed in Australia – the World Wetlands Day 2011 classroom activity pack is available at <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/environmental/wetlands/classroom-kit.html>.

We had fun in the office testing out the origami pelican, frog and turtle but there are also word activities, video clips, images, games and stickers in the classroom activity pack.

NEVER TOO YOUNG

How many ducklings can you see? This was the excited question asked by parents and teachers of children from Livingston Kindergarten, Highett, Victoria. An interested parent from the kindergarten had obtained a grant from the local bayside council to help raise awareness of urban wildlife for the kinder community. An excursion was organised at Basterfield Park which contains a small lake that supports a good variety of birds.

A short introductory talk was given explaining which birds we would see, using skins and puppets. The main message related to what birds eat and how humans can make sure their habitat is kept healthy. Some children were quite familiar with birds and were able to tell us that some eat nectar and others seeds.

Tania Ireton from BAYBOCA and I then led a bird walk around the park. The children and their parents were able to see both Pacific Black Ducks and Australian Wood Ducks with their ducklings. There were also Dusky Moorhens and Eurasian Coots with chicks and two Magpie-lark nests were spotted in the trees.

The morning finished with the children making a bird mask.

THREATENED AUSTRALIAN BIRDS FREE DVD

Several years after beginning the project to produce the Threatened Species DVD we finally have limited copies available. These have been sent with the summer edition of *The Stickybeak News*. If you would like a copy of this DVD or *Our Winged Neighbours* please contact BOCA and we will arrange to send you complimentary copies.

GUNBOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL, VIC

Students at Gunbower Primary School participated in a bird education day as part of Photoboca's Digital Photography in the Bush. All levels of the school listened to a short presentation about what makes a bird a bird and an introduction to some local birds. The students then divided into three groups, based on year level, and rotated around three activities.

In a nearby park the children were introduced to birdwatching using a scope and binoculars by Malcolm Cousland from Boort. I introduced the children to owls. We dissected pellets and studied some of the bones using the school's microscopes. The teachers helped the children to make kites or masks. Many multi-coloured kites could be seen flying around the school oval.

EDUCATION VOLUNTEER TRAINING WORKSHOP

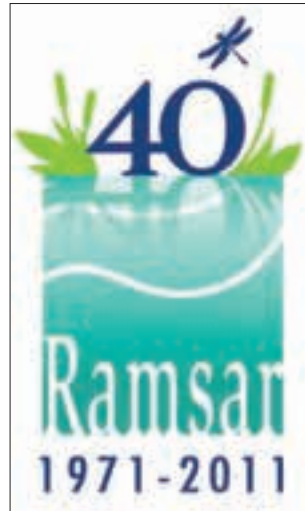
As part of the Western Port Welcomes Waterbirds project, funding has been provided to hold an education volunteers' workshop on Thursday, 24 March 2011. The aim of the workshop is to help BOCA volunteers gain skills for working with schools. Workshop sessions will cover the needs of schools, tips for planning a field trip with children, outline of available resources and information about the birds of Western Port.

During the afternoon participants will have the opportunity to work with a school group on a field trip.

An education kit will be made available for volunteers. The emphasis will be on birds found around Western Port. The kit will include information about key species, migration, feeding techniques, habitat and threats to survival. There will also be activities suitable for a range of ages.

TOWNSVILLE GRANT FOR EDUCATION PROGRAM

TRBOC was successful in an application for \$10,650.00 funding through an Australian Government Caring for Country - Community Action Grant for the project "Improving Wetland Protection through Community Skill Building in the Townsville Region". The aim of the project is to build primary school students' awareness of wetland values and management through targeted in-school presentations and activities. TRBOC will also produce a booklet detailing local wetlands and the 50 most likely wetland birds to be seen in the region for use as a teaching aid. This project builds on two previous projects funded by North Queensland Dry Tropics which TRBOC produced and presented: *Coastal Birds of the Dry Tropics* and *Woodland Birds of the Dry Tropics*. Those two projects involved the production of two booklets and 20 in-school presentations to approximately 830 primary school students.



Middle: Looking for more detail using a microscope. Bottom: Happily dissecting owl pellets. Photos: Annette Cook

BIRDS OF WHITTLESEA

Local residents were invited to an information session, Thursday, 20 January, and a field trip Saturday, 22 January 2011, organised by James Booth from the City of Whittlesea. Natasha Robinson from Latrobe University spoke about her research, "Refuges for Birds in Fire Prone Areas" and Graeme Hosken shared information gathered through the ongoing BOCA Challenge Count.

The field trip was conducted in Kinglake West on private property and enabled participants to learn more about birds in their local area. Participants have been encouraged to keep records of birds that they see on their properties.