



2018 NATIONAL LANDCARE AWARDS

11 October
Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre

Nominee: Woodleigh School Penbank Campus, VIC
Category: Woolworths Junior Landcare Team Award

Students from Woodleigh School Penbank Campus on the Mornington Peninsula have swapped the classroom for the creek, through their involvement with Balcombe Moorooduc Landcare Group's Balcombe Creek Habitat Project. The project, led by local Landcare member Tony O'Connor, aims to foster strong connections between the students and their natural environment.

A day at school can involve researching, designing and creating habitats for indigenous fauna along a section of the Balcombe Creek at Mt Martha. Students start by researching the habitat requirements of their chosen species. This knowledge is reinforced with hands-on learning through habitat creation. Habitats include frog bogs; lizard lounges; nest boxes for birds, possums and bats; logs for bush rats; and bug hotels. The students work with different tools and materials to build the habitats, with the assistance of Landcare volunteers, teachers and parents. The wider school community – including parents, grandparents and siblings – are strongly encouraged to take part in the project, by attending revegetation days, where students share their knowledge and parents can offer expertise, materials and a helping hand.

The Balcombe Creek Habitat Project provides young people with the opportunity to get involved in Landcare and gives them the skills to help care for their local natural environment. Once a barren and deserted area dominated by pasture grasses and blackberry, Balcombe Creek at Mt Martha has been transformed into a beautiful gathering place filled with indigenous vegetation. The creek line has now become a vital community space, where students regularly gather to work on their habitat and families visit to connect with nature and enjoy the area.

Showcasing the achievements of the Balcombe Creek Habitat Project in school assemblies and at the annual Student Expo has encouraged other students to take action to preserve and protect native wildlife. Teachers have reported that since the school's involvement with the project, students are now more connected to their natural environment and are more willing to take action on environmental issues. According to Matthew Chambers, the teacher facilitating the program at Penbank, "It's always a challenge to get children outside, away from screens, and involved in authentic learning experiences. The Habitat Project provides a way for children to connect to the outdoors."

This interest in the natural environment has seen many students extend this passion into other aspects of their learning. Fundraisers have been held to raise money for materials and to improve awareness of sustainability issues, endangered animals have been sponsored, and some students have also started undertaking habitat improvement at home, creating frog bogs and trying to attract wildlife to their properties. Parents have been inspired by their children's interest and some have sought assistance from Balcombe Moorooduc Landcare Group to make nest boxes to install in their own gardens.

The Balcombe Creek Habitat Project's achievements were broadcast on a national scale when Tony presented at the 2016 National Landcare Conference. In addition, the Habitat Project was also visited by conference delegates. In 2017 the site was visited by committee members of Bass Coast Landcare Network and local Federal Member for Flinders, Hon. Greg

This program is supported by Landcare Australia and the National Landcare Network, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.





2018 NATIONAL LANDCARE AWARDS

11 October
Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre

Hunt. The opportunities have enabled the project to become a vehicle to promote the great work of Landcare and how groups can work towards helping inspire the next generation of Landcarers, by connecting children to the environment.

The partnership between Woodleigh School Penbank Campus and Balcombe Moorooduc Landcare Group is a strong and ongoing one which benefits both parties. The Landcare Group has provided great support to the school in terms of providing incursion and excursion opportunities where students can learn about indigenous fauna, habitat recreation and ecology in a theoretical and practical way. Furthermore, the students have been able to improve their communication, problem solving and teamwork abilities as they communicate the issue of habitat loss with the local community.

The Group have faced a couple of challenges in the delivery of the Balcombe Creek Habitat Project including the ongoing need for funding – especially for materials for the students – as well as working the project around the school's timetable. However, through careful planning, and using the project as a classroom learning opportunity, the project has produced a practical, positive way for students to take action on environmental issues and helped to involve the whole community in protecting their local creek.

Landcare is a grassroots movement that harnesses individuals and groups to protect, restore and sustainably manage Australia's natural environment and its productivity. Groups that fall under the Landcare umbrella work on a diverse range of environmental projects and include farmers embracing sustainable farm management and any community group that partakes in volunteer environmental activities. To find out how you can become a Landcare volunteer and for full details on all 2016 National Landcare finalists, visit www.landcareaustralia.org.au

Ends

For further information, photographs or interviews contact:

Naomi Straw
Landcare Australia
naomi.straw@landcareaustralia.com.au
02 8440 8823

Penbank Campus – Woodleigh School
Matthew Chambers
mchambers@woodleigh.vic.edu.au
03 5978 8425

Web Summary

Students from Woodleigh School Penbank Campus on the Mornington Peninsula have swapped the classroom for the creek, through their involvement with Balcombe Moorooduc Landcare Group's Balcombe Creek Habitat Project. The project, led by local Landcare member Tony O'Connor, aims to foster strong connections between the students and their natural environment. A day at school can involve researching, designing and creating habitat for indigenous fauna along a section of the Balcombe Creek at Mt Martha. Students start by researching the habitat requirements of their chosen species. This knowledge is reinforced with hands-on learning through habitat creation. Habitats include frog bogs; lizard lounges; nestboxes for birds, possums and bats; logs for bush rats; and bug hotels.

This program is supported by Landcare Australia and the National Landcare Network, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

