

Wimmera Home Education Group - Water quality, a small wetland and tourism

WHEG spent some of the most recent 'Third Thursday afternoon at the Horsham Botanical Gardens' doing some water based activities for National Water Week - "Healthy catchments, Healthy communities".

Our local water

What's our water like? Families brought their water samples from homes, lakes and farms from across our region, so there was great curiosity about how good it would be. Ginny taught everyone how to test it for salinity and pH and what their results meant. The salinities ranged from a low of 80 us/cm EC, from a rain water tank at Jung, up to a moderate of about 1200 us/cm ECs from Lake Hindmarsh – all good for its source of water. The pH's were likewise good, most being neutral. A healthy result for these tests!



Investigating a wetland

We then moved to a nearby secluded wetland coming from the commercial part of Horsham, where there was a constant chattering of birdsong, and an occasional pobblebonk frog call. We were looking for ideas for features that would indicate a healthy water place and an attractive one for tourists.



What water creatures live here?

Michael had collected water samples and prepared water bugs into scopes for everyone to see close-up.

He found 13 species, of which bloodworms, mosquito larvae, backswimmers and boatmen (photo below).



After doing a 3-day workshop on such aquatic macro-invertebrates at Monash University in April and work experience at CAPIM in August, Michael was pleased to be able to share his knowledge by leading this water-bug session for the group (photo below). Later, he analysed the sample fully and concluded that it was representative of a polluted waterway, which was to be expected as its source was town water runoff.



Photo by K. Harris

Other life here was Purple Swampheens, Pacific Black Ducks, tadpoles and a Pobblebonk frog calling.

What about the plant life?

Ginny provided bark samples for the three main tree types around our water places, which indicate places that may flood: River Red Gums most often; Black Boxes, rarely but sometimes; as are Salt Paperbarks, found where the water can get salty. This wetland was almost surrounded by Slender Honey Myrtle - just coming out in dainty mauve blossom. There was one wattle with curly strings on it, which Karen identified as seed pods starting to grow. There were two dominant species of water plants - Common Rush around the pond and a water ribbon - Streaked Arrow Grass- in it.

From the right directions – i.e. not towards the fence! - this was an attractive little place. We discussed how to care for such places by not littering here nor in the streets of our towns. The children went home with some drawings and ideas that could be used for the World Wetlands Day Art competition – 'wetlands, tourism and recreation' -see www.wetlandcare.com.au