

# Wimmera Home Education Group - Sharing Living Things on our Farmlands

What interesting/exciting/amazing living things are around you? WHEG families live in a rural area, many on or linked to farms. In November, seven families and some 20 children meeting at Warracknabeal's Wheatlands Educational Resource Centre, shared something special about living things in our farmlands as our Australian Year of the Farmer activity- 'raising the profile of farming amongst ourselves' and learning from each other.



## Foals

Pony stories were about two recently born foals: a Buckskin, and an Arab. If a foal doesn't get up within an hour or so of being born, it won't be able to 'go to the milk bar' and get a drink of its mother's milk. What could you do help a foal that is down too long? The solution is to massage the lower part of the back legs, and help it stand. What a relief when it does and gets that first drink! Another important sign of health is its first 'poo' shortly after – Notice the raised tail in the photo left? How similar is any of this to human children? Consider the time to stand, need for milk and pooping!



## Quails

One of the older children had been on a header - a machine which takes off the heads of grain from crops. He had noticed many quail families hiding in the crops. Big and little quails would run ahead of the cutting cones when they were disturbed by its approach. After the header had passed by, they would disappear into the stubble (stalks that remain after the heads are cut off). Why don't they leave there? The big machinery used to harvest the crop gets most, but not all, the grain. Some falls on the ground and this is enough for the quail family to live in and feed on. So with cover and food in the stubble, there is no good reason to leave!

## Bees

Bees had first become noticed by one family in the autumn – they came into the garden in search of water. The children watched them and noticed preferred plants from which they would feed. They had taken photos of them and learnt about how important bees are for all the plants, including the crops.

## A weed

Wouldn't you think that a weed (Scotch Thistle\*) that was declared 'noxious' way back in 1856 would have no good features to it? Well there were – for example ponies seem to like the flowers as food.



## Ladybirds

Ladybirds were at home all over the Scotch Thistles. These insects are very important in a garden as they eat insect pests.

One family had found ladybird eggs in their backyard garden – a great sign that their veggie plot was healthy, and even more so as they didn't have the weed as well.

## Mudeyes

Back in September there had been a couple of afternoons when lots of dragon flies had been flitting around the flower garden. Scotch Thistle had helped them too. How? Dragon flies, with their big wings, come from mudeyes – their nymph body. The wings have to dry before they can fly. If they don't fly, they die without meeting a mate and laying eggs for the next generation. So the mudeyes need to have something very solid to crawl up out of the water into and cling onto where they will emerge into dragon flies. A Scotch Thistle is very strong and there were lots of mudeye skeletons still gripping their leaves, like in this photo to the right.



## Plants

One family created a model to show photosynthesis in a plant (described in *Otherways* no. 129, page 30 2011). Their model (photo below) shows us water and carbon going through the plant and leaves taking Carbon from the air and storing it when it creates all the plant parts with it. Plants link all we had seen and remind us of their importance for our lives.



Is this only local learning? Sharing our farming stories was a very local backyard activity, but fitted under a global long-term challenge, the United Nations Decade of Biodiversity targets: 1 (increasing knowledge of species), 13 (of domestic animals), 9 (of invasive alien species) and 19 (sharing our knowledge). "Acting locally, thinking globally" can be easy to do together.

\* A 'challenge' activity to identify and learn more about this weed is found as a pdf called "What weed is this?" at <http://enviroed4all.com.au/biodiversity-on-our-farm/weeds>