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Monitoring Groups/Site Information

1145 Groups, 3328 participants, 801 sites

Coordinators

Keir Jarvis, Ilona Jung, Ben Scullin, Joanne McManus, Jessica Miller, Edward Tsyrlin, Trish Grant, Paul Evans, Lee Mitchell, Kathryn Rhook, Anja Steiner

Port Phillip

A committed team of energetic 9 and 10 year olds were determined to discover why the platypus had disappeared from the Lower Plenty River.

Kids solve platypus mystery

Recent disappearances of the platypus from the lower Plenty River prompted students from Apollo Parkways Primary School to approach Melbourne Waterwatch for help. As they joined Ben Scullin and the Melbourne Waterwatch trailer down at the river, they embarked on a program that would bring about community change.

Guided by Melbourne Waterwatch, the students conducted a series of physical and chemical water-quality tests, macro-invertebrate sampling, habitat assessments and litter surveys. Using equipment usually reserved for the most sophisticated monitors, the 9 and 10 year olds completed an intensive five-month study to identify the major river health issues and determine what needed to be done.



Apollo Parkway's students identify macroinvertebrates collected from the Lower Plenty River.



Students perform a number of physico-chemical tests on the Lower Plenty.

Although the Plenty's physical and chemical properties were relatively healthy, their habitat assessments painted a different picture. The students suspected a diminished macroinvertebrate community, and after a series of rapid bio assessments, macro-invertebrate diversity was found to be poor. They realised the Plenty was unlikely to support platypus, as they rely on diverse and abundant macro-invertebrate communities for food.

Additional surveys revealed another serious problem - litter. Very high levels of gross litter contaminants were found within five transects. Clearly something needed to be done, as litter causes high rates of platypus mortality through fouling and subsequent injury.

Firstly, the students produced a DVD of their study to convey the messages they had learnt to other interested groups. It was launched at a movie premiere to the Hon. Elaine Carbines, Mayor of Nillumbik, local councillors, Melbourne Water, and local community members. Students recommended a two-stage rehabilitation program be implemented to restore the in-stream habitat and address litter problems.

Melbourne Water subsequently launched a 'Clean up the Plenty' campaign on behalf of Melbourne Waterwatch, which has received

cross-municipality support from local councils along the Plenty. It will involve a litter clean-up week, litter surveys, drain-stencilling, and Gross Pollutant Trap assessments. The second stage of the campaign will then target in-stream cover to restore macro-invertebrate abundance and diversity.

In the meantime, you can rest assured that the Apollo Parkways students will continue with their research and help to inspire others in the hope that one day soon the platypus will again call the Plenty River home.