

BANJO BITES

Newsletter of the
Friends of the Marine Discovery Centre Inc
PO Box 127, Queenscliff 3225

SUMMER 2011

MEETINGS

Monday, 21st Feb, 2010 at DPI, 4.30 pm

Monday, 21st Mar, 2010 at DPI, 4.30 pm.

All members welcome.

SUMMER BY THE SEA HOLIDAY PROGRAM

The Marine Discovery Centre had another very successful summer in terms of visitors, with approximately 3000 people through the door. About a third of the visitors participated in holiday program activities like snorkelling and canoeing.

One of the most popular activities was the Rockpool Ramble that could have been booked 3 times over on some days. One of the craft activities - magical merpeople - also proved very popular, with children on a waiting list.

The MDC trailer, staffed by Alan and Perry, was out and about this summer, at the Queenscliff harbour and over the other side of the bay in Mornington.

Rinchen was also a popular presence on the Queenscliff Sorrento ferry talking to passengers about Port Phillip Bay and all the

wonders underwater that they can't see from the ferry. Lots of happy kids (and parents)!



Figure 1 Exploring the rockpools

The **Annual Elaine Tingay Scholarship** was this year awarded to Darcy Chiller - see Darcy's winning essay on page 3.



Figure 2 Darcy Chiller receiving her award

Science Experience Program

17 students from as far afield as Theodore in Queensland, Bright, Portland and Kyneton and little known places, such as Kongwak and Wurdi Boluc came to the Bellarine Peninsula to participate in the national Science Experience program. The reputation of the MDC as an international leader in marine education led to it being the only non tertiary institution hosting the program.

Students worked with passionate scientists on a range of experiments and presentations, including dissecting squid and fish and pressing seaweed.

Our intrepid snorkel and canoe instructor- Alex (pictured), revealed an exciting marine world beneath the surface of Port Phillip Bay. Shona and Alex from Kyneton wrote "... can't thank you enough for looking after us, and showing us the meaning of marine biology and showing us that you can be anything you like when you put your mind to it."

An exciting development for 2011, resulting from the high interest and passion shown by students, not only in the Science Experience but also through careers days and work experience, will be the implementation of a Junior Volunteers Program. This program will be trialled during the next school holidays. The MDC has been really appreciative of the Friends accommodation support for the current volunteers.



Figure 3 Education Officer Alex the mermaid

Article by Pam Haebich
Science Experience Coordinator



Figure 4 In the lab



Figure 5 Exploring the bay

WORLD WETLANDS DAY

World Wetlands Day is an international day to celebrate all wetlands worldwide.

World Wetlands Day 2011 commemorates the 40th year since the signing of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) in Ramsar, Iran, February 2, 1971.

To celebrate this, the Marine Discovery Centre ran a series of free community activities on the morning of Sunday, February 6 at Swan Bay wetlands - part of the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar site.

School students from local primary schools produced information posters to help inform their families about the values of Swan Bay and for community education on the day.

Activities included a guided early morning canoe trip on Swan Bay, breakfast, a walk and talk with Wathaurong Cultural Education Officer David Tournier beside Swan Bay and presentations from Clonard College students on the importance of the Swan Bay ecosystem. Swan Bay is an important Victorian fish feeding and nursery area for species such as King George whiting. It provides vital habitat for many animals and plants, including the critically endangered orange bellied parrot, and migratory shorebirds that fly thousands of kilometres to visit these wetlands.

Professor Gregory Jenkins from Fisheries Victoria who will also talk about the seagrass beds in Swan Bay and their importance to Victoria's fisheries.



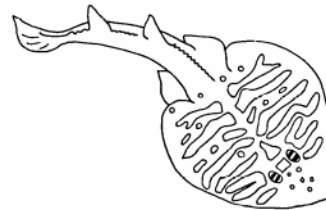
Figure 6 World Wetlands Day activity

SIPS, SEALS AND SUNSET BOAT CRUISE

FRIDAY February 18TH 6:15 – 8.00PM

Last year's cruise saw 25 enthusiastic members and friends board the 'Kyena' for a sunset cruise and marine biology experience. If you are keen to participate in this year's

cruise see the attached flyer for booking information.



Vale Helen Mair

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the passing of Helen last year following a brief illness. Helen served as secretary on the Friends of Marine Discovery Centre Committee for several years and was a driving force in all of the endeavours that we have undertaken as a group. She was also a passionate volunteer at the Marine Discovery Centre. She was a true friend and an inspiration. She is sadly missed.



Figure 7 Helen Mair (left) and Jenny, wife of MDC manager Phil Armato.

Living by the Sea

By Darcy Chiller

Here are some ideas for how I would like Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff's future to be like around our marine environment.

Firstly, here is a short story.

Grabbing my wetsuit and goggles from the car boot, I run down to the harbour. I quickly jump on the boat, when I do, Dad starts up the engine. I hear the chugga-chugga-chugga of the old well worn motor. The boat splutters into gear and takes off from the harbour leaving a bubbly trail behind it. As we get further out to sea, away from the harbour, I look back at the giant screw as I call it. Its real name is the lookout tower. People are watching from above like seagulls in the sky. The land behind us disappears and Dad speeds up. Even though the engine and boat is old, it still works well. Coming into view out in front of us is a little black line. I know that line, it's Popes Eye. That's our first stop.

We near the curve of black rocks. They are turning white because of the gannets! Dad stops the boat and Mum is getting her gear out. I pull my wetsuit up and stretch my arm around for the zip. I stretch my goggles around my head and step up onto the edge of the boat and leap into the icy cold water. It fills my wetsuit up, sending a tingle through my body. As the water adjusts to my body temperature, I dive down. Deeper, deeper, deeper down, into the dark depths. I don't like using a snorkel and mask, I just like holding my breath. Rays of sunlight shine on the water, making the rocky reef light up. Its bright glow is always welcoming. The best reef in the world, down in Port Phillip Bay!

Little clown fish dart in and out of the sea anemones, their bright colours illuminated in the light of the reef. Zebra fish glide through the water sending ripple out behind them. Blennies are swimming in and out of the holes in the rock timidly. Cowfish turn this way and that and tiny sea horses, hanging back with their tails curled around sea grass. Brightly coloured star fish, orange, blue, yellow, are stuck to the rock. A group of little purple fish hurry past alongside a slow moving puffer fish. A shoal of fluorescent blue fish swim past, glimmering and showing off their shiny scales. And below all of this traffic is a huge sting ray, startling me out of my thoughts.

I hear a splash as Mum jumps in next to me. I see her flinch at the sting ray but only for a second. Her eyes light up at the fish, just as always. We swim around to the other side. It is shallower and there is less current. Box jellies float past, I am careful not to touch them. Leather jackets of all colours swim past us. I hear a splash over the other side, dad.

I pull myself out of the water and up into the back seat of the boat, tightly wrapping my towel around me. Our next stop is a while away so mum gets a cold drink out for me and some bickies with cheese. The boat speeds off into the distance, whitewash splashing behind us. As I nibble on my biscuits, I see a small black dot in the distance. It is getting closer and closer.

The boat engine slows as the boat pulls up to a stop at Chinamans Hut. Uhh, they stink! I hang my towel up on the rail and pull up my cold wetsuit, cooling me down from the hot summer sun. Pulling my goggles over my head, once again I step up

onto the side of the boat. SPLASH!! I hit the water, colder than Popes Eye. I dive down playfully, like a seal. The seals around me swim closer, curious. The dive and spin and tumble in the water around me. I look down, down to the bottom of the sea, to find little crabs scuttling about on the ocean floor. I dive down as far as I can go, with the seals. I love playing with the seals. They are fun!
A small seal nears me, daring to go closer, almost brushing its fur against my wetsuit. I want this to stay. To be here for as long as my grandchildren's grandchildren live. So they can see it.

The next day, a couple of friends of mine along with me have come up with a few ideas to help the community be an environmentally friendly place; it will help the marine environment as well. So far we have come up with a few ideas. We could have solar panels, water tanks and a veggie garden already. We plan to make more native gardens, with paths and rocks. We don't want to end up being like a big city, Melbourne; we want to be our own environmentally friendly town, with a healthy marine environment. We also thought that we can have rubbish clean up days, that can help prevent animals from getting injured.

Another thing that will help Point Lonsdale enormously is the plastic bag ban. I heard somewhere that in the next week, there will be a plastic bag ban. It will help prevent Point Lonsdale from becoming a litter infested town.

Mum called me and told me to get my jumper because we were taking our dog for a walk along the tracks. I like to call them the secret tracks that lie behind the sand dunes. I jumped in the car and we made the short trip to the dog beach. I jumped out of the car and started walking up the hill towards the beach. Mum followed with Ginger, our dog. About three quarters of the way up, there is a path leading away from the hill. It takes you along the top of the sand dunes. We turned up that path and started walking.

We came to an open area. I took off my shoes and walked along the soft silky sand and looked out to sea. WHALES!

We hardly ever see whales, but sometimes we are lucky enough to see some. Today, a whole pod! If we made our town into a city, we would frighten the whales away. I want to keep it this way though, so not just the past generations can enjoy them, but the future generations as well.

When I got home, I realised how lucky we are, to have a wonderful marine environment and town. I thought that it should stay this way, for more and more generations to see, so that our town doesn't just have stories to tell, but things to enjoy as well.

Here are some of the ways to help our environment stay the way it is for the future to enjoy.

Idea #1: Rubbish Collecting Days.

The amount of litter around is increasing. People are not caring about our lovely marine environment. They don't realise that when they drop some plastic wrap or wrappers on the ground, it blows with the wind, slowly making its way out to sea.

Our beautiful birdlife thinks the plastic wrap is a jellyfish and eats it. The plastic wrap ends up choking the bird to death. Do you want this to happen? I don't, that's why I think the council should organise rubbish pick-up days, to help save our beautiful marine life and make our town a clean town.

Idea #2: Canvas Bags

Plastic bags are a real problem with our marine environment. They get blown out to sea and look like jellyfish to marine wildlife. Canvas bags are great. You don't have yucky plastic bags flapping around, but reusable bags, environmentally friendly.

Idea #3: Look but Don't Touch

If you were a sea creature in a rock pool, say a sea star, you wouldn't like people coming and touching you and pulling you out of your environment, suffocating you? You probably wouldn't. It's okay to look at the creatures and enjoy their presence, but don't go sticking your fingers into a rock pool. Also it can be dangerous for you because there could be something poisonous, or a dangerous creature. So, look but **don't touch**. We don't want to destroy our marine life!

So that's what I would like Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff to stay the way it is, with only a few minor changes to help our marine environment stay alive for future generations to see, so they can enjoy it too, not just us. It is special, and for everyone.

Thank you, by Darcy Chiller