



river

DETECTIVES

Statewide
Annual Report
2025



Showcase stall at the 2025
ResourceSmart Awards

"We delivered this program to 400 students in 2025. Students were educated on how to look after wetlands and their importance as well as the creatures that inhabit these areas. The program is a great hands-on activity that suited foundation to VCE students."

Ebonee Armistead, Parks Victoria Serendip Sanctuary





Smoking ceremony at Wirra-Lo wetland

Acknowledgement

The River Detectives program acknowledges the Traditional Owners across the regions on which the program is delivered. We recognise their rich culture and spiritual connection to Country and the contribution and interest of Aboriginal people and organisations in land and natural resource management.

Program delivery

[River Detectives](#) is an engaging environmental education program that connects young people to their local waterway, promoting stewardship and student-lead advocacy. Students participate in citizen science, monitoring water quality, macroinvertebrates and habitat. They learn about the importance of healthy waterways through meaningful hands-on learning, connecting with their community to care for it. Participating schools are provided with equipment, support, training, and teaching resources.

2025 River Detectives delivery partners offering the program to schools/groups in their region

- North Central Catchment Management Authority supported by Agnico Eagle
- Corangamite Catchment Management Authority supported by Central Highlands Water and Barwon Water
- North East Catchment Management Authority
- Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
- Melbourne Water



Environmental Education providers

In some regions, environmental education providers offer River Detectives content to additional schools that engage with them through incursions and excursions.

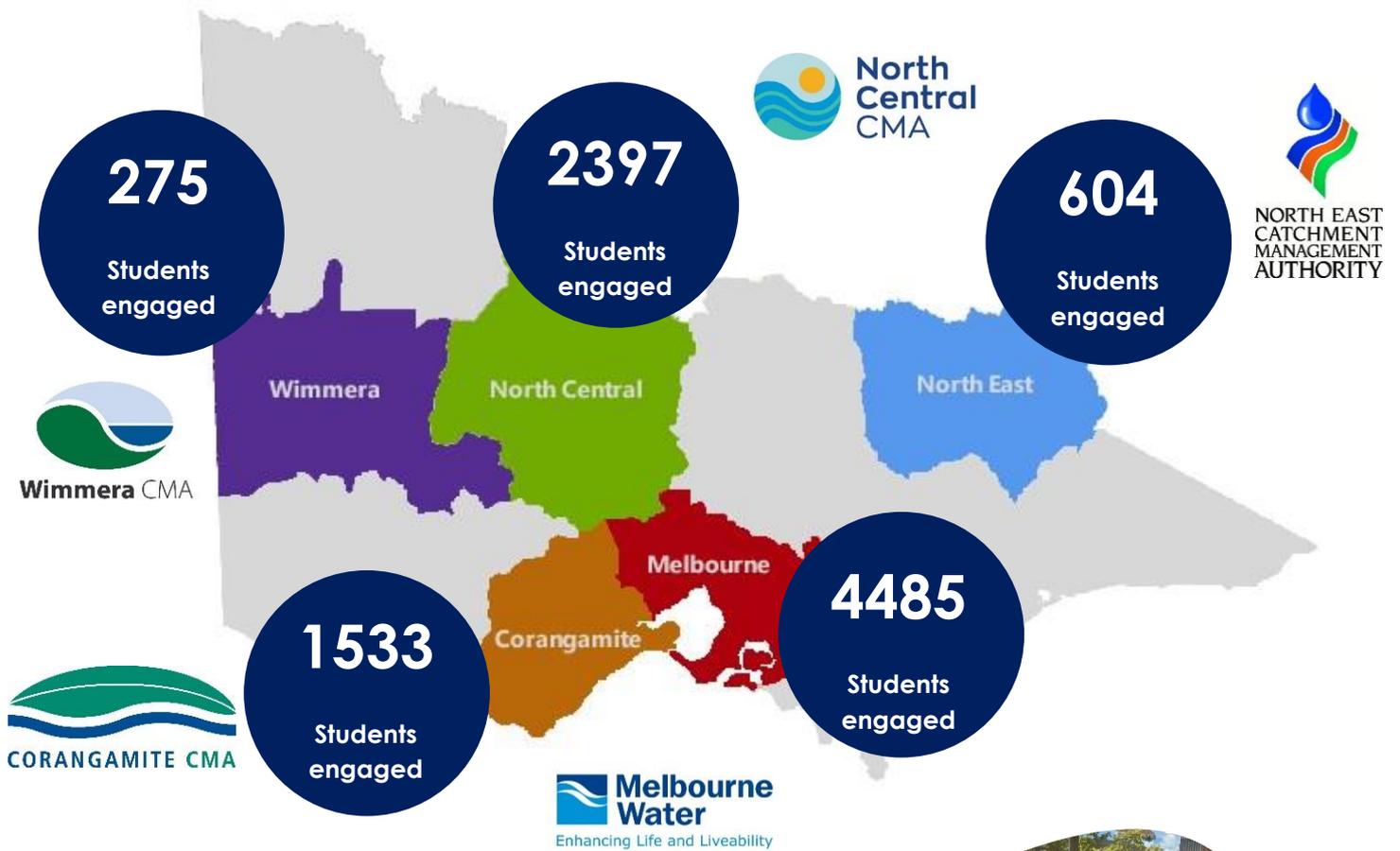
- Serendip Sanctuary (Corangamite CMA region)
- Greater Western Water, Healesville Sanctuary, Werribee River Association and Yarra Riverkeeper Association (Melbourne Water area)
- TwistED Science (North Central CMA region)

ResourceSmart Schools

Some [ResourceSmart Schools](#) facilitators have received River Detectives induction, are resourced with equipment and are available to deliver content to schools involved in both programs.



Statewide engagement snapshot



Southern Pygmy-Perch fish release at Kennington Reservoir



St James' Parish School, Sebastopol sorting waterbugs



Marist College research project

140
Groups engaged

83
Primary

24
Secondary

19
P-12 Schools

6
EnvEd Providers

2
Homeschool Groups

1
Youth Groups

5
Early Childhood



Victory Christian College sampling waterbugs



Turtle School in the Gunbower Forest

100
Participating groups via CMA's

- 36 North Central CMA
- 20 Corangamite CMA
- 11 North East CMA
- 13 Wimmera CMA
- 20 Melbourne Water

33
Participating schools via Environmental Education providers

- 8 Serendip Sanctuary
- 10 Greater Western Water
- 6 Yarra River Keepers
- 7 Healesville Sanctuary
- 2 Werribee River Association

7
Participating schools via ResourceSmart Schools

- 5 RSS Loddon Mallee
- 2 RSS Gippsland

139

Waterway monitoring sites

- 44 North Central CMA
- 27 Corangamite CMA
- 14 North East CMA
- 14 Wimmera CMA
- 37 Melbourne Water



In-class water quality testing at Marist College

138

Citizen Science Data Entries

- 53 North Central CMA
- 52 Corangamite CMA
- 11 North East CMA
- na Wimmera CMA
- 22 Melbourne Water

216

Educators supported

- 57 North Central CMA
- 43 Corangamite CMA
- 25 North East CMA
- 21 Wimmera CMA
- 70 Melbourne Water

18

Training workshops delivered



Macroinvertebrate educator workshop, Barwon River Geelong



Delving Into The Data: with statewide WaterWatch facilitator Justine Holmes



Platyplus Month – Get in the Loop: with Healesville Sanctuary's Jessica Thomas

2

Webinars recorded

35

School sessions delivered by CMA's

56

School sessions delivered by Environmental Education Providers

12

School sessions delivered by ResourceSmart Schools



River Detectives coordinator Bec McCristal engaging students at Pleasant Street PS



River Detectives coordinator Nicole Howie classifying waterbugs with Langley PS students

"This year's River Detective highlights included removing 30kgs of rubbish from our testing sites, saving and releasing a long-necked turtle (caught in fishing line) at our testing site, and gaining a greater understanding of molluscs and their importance to our waterways."

Sam Millar, Cornish College educator
Melbourne Water area



Werribee River Association work with Year 9 students from Truganina College



River Detectives coordinator Jeanie Clark of Minyip Kinder with aquatic plants

Program and school highlights

2025 ResourceSmart Schools Awards, June 5, Melbourne Cricket Ground

Congratulations to **Victory Christian College (Bendigo)** who won the Curriculum Leadership Secondary School of the Year.



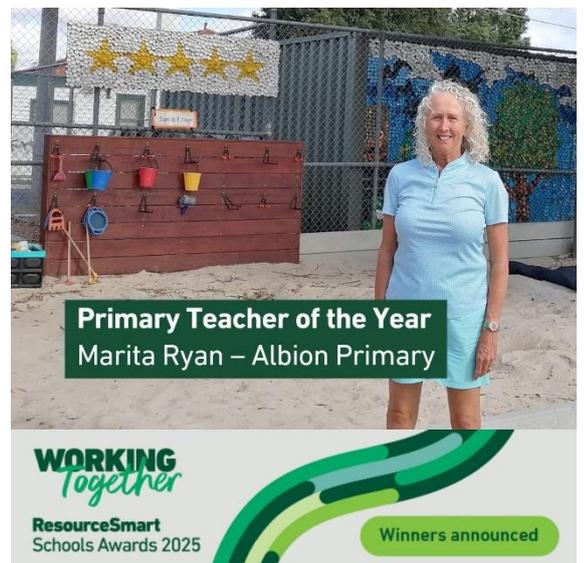
“Students contribute to citizen science – tracking changes during dam repairs at Kennington Reservoir, collecting water samples, and entering data into the River Detectives database. Student efforts also include breeding native fish and planting aquatic plants to aid ecosystem restoration. Through hands-on methods such as dissecting fish to assess microplastic pollution, they discovered significant levels in species such as the Tench. Their findings on plastic pollution have been shared with local authorities, to raise broader awareness.”

Ro Rimmer, Victory Christian College educator

Congratulations to **Marita Ryan, Albion Primary School** who won Primary Teacher of the Year. Marita has been a passionate River Detectives educator since 2016!

Marita’s work to embed sustainability as a cross-curriculum priority has inspired the school and resulted in an increase in community partnerships, including with Landcare, River Detectives, and Brimbank Council, and with local businesses, parents, and volunteers.

Her dedication and approachable leadership have ingrained a culture of sustainability within the school community – and has helped the school achieve so much more when working together with others.



Students learnt traditional weaving techniques to make spherical habitat pods for wetlands



Gunbower PS works with Barapa Traditional Owners, May



Children learnt about fox and rakali predation of turtles at this school holiday event

Turtle School at Gunbower Forest, September

An event lead by the school to aid 2022 flood recovery along with Landcare and Skipton Angling Club



Skipton PS Clear the Carp fishing competition, April

“River Detectives is an invaluable part of our Duke of Edinburgh program, providing meaningful engagement in scientific and community service.

River Detectives is a recognised water surveillance program that students respect.

It motivates them to undertake testing with scientific rigor and gets students outdoors, participating in hands-on local environmental science throughout the year that they ordinarily would not have an opportunity to do.”

Sirius College educator



Waterbug sessions offered at Timboon P-12 School's TAP's ON! 2025 event



A school activity pack was collated for the Australian Platypus Networks celebration of Platypus Month

Story of Change Corangamite CMA region

Corangamite CMA region chose to shine a light on Emmaus Catholic Primary School for their 2025 Story of Change.

Emmaus Catholic Primary School (ECPS) is located in Mt Clear, a suburb on the southern edge of Ballarat. They have been involved in the River Detectives program for four years, testing the health of Union Jack Creek in Buninyong, Canadian Creek in Mt Clear and previously the Yarrowee Creek in Sebastopol.

“Beyond its academic value, River Detectives is a core expression of our Catholic mission to care for our common home and to respect and protect sacred land. It fosters a deep sense of environmental stewardship, responsibility and connection to creation in our students.”

Emmaus Catholic PS educator



ECPS students rate water quality

The Story of Change article can be read [here](#) and video can be viewed [here](#).

Story of Change North Central CMA region

North Central CMA region showcased RedGum for their 2025 Story of Change.

RedGum is located in Muckleford. The school has been involved in the River Detectives program for a very long time, gradually embedding the program across their K-8 programs.

Their school wetland system catches all water from the site. They have been a valuable source of inquiry learning and innovative research. So that the wetlands function as an effective filtration system and offer unique environmental benefits, students have been involved in improving the wetlands.

“Students have added aquatic vegetation, in-stream habitat structures of logs and rocks, nest boxes with monitoring cameras and aeration devices. Endangered Southern Purple-Spotted Gudgeon have been released in one wetland as part of a Charles Sturt University study into managing exotic Gambusia populations. We are also aiming to have a Pondi device installed to measure the impact aquatic aerators have on sequestering carbon. This is part of an RMIT research project.”

RedGum site manager



RedGum students keep an eye on the wetlands

The story can be read [here](#) and video can be viewed [here](#).

Wimmera Water Places project

In the Wimmera CMA region, coordinator Jeanie Clark devised an innovative catchment education opportunity for all schools in the region. This helped reach a broader audience of schools beyond the core River Detectives program.

The Wimmera has an amazing variety and number of water places, contradicting its reputation as a dry region. This 2025 project aimed to encourage young people to share their feelings about the water places in their area.

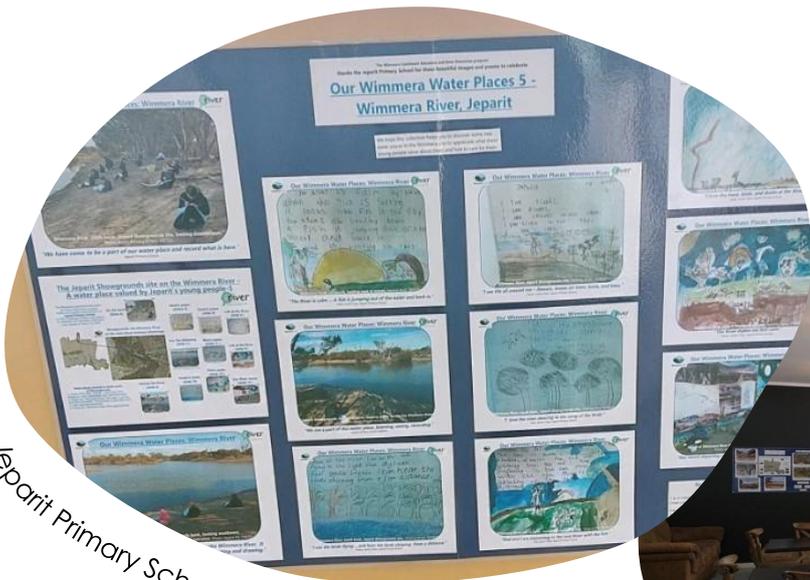
Jeanie liaised with schools across the region and enjoyed receiving student messages about the value of their water places. These were accompanied by photos, turned into six slideshows and distributed by Jeanie to all 40 schools in the region to use in science / geography programs.

Using student contributions, Jeanie also developed six double A2 posters that were displayed in prominent locations of Wimmera towns for a fortnight each.

Displays appeared in the Stawell, Dimboola and Nhill libraries, Goroke, Minyip and Jeparit Health Centres, Warracknabeal Commbank windows, Murtoa Neighbourhood House, Halls Gap café / supermarket and Earles shop windows in Horsham.

These displays shared students' reflections with a broader community audience, encouraging townfolk and visitors to understand and appreciate the Wimmera's water places too.

Articles about the project were published in two Wimmera Mallee News publications



Jeparit Primary School Water Places panel



Posters on display in the Halls Gap café

Cultural events

Embedding cultural perspectives is a high priority of the River Detectives program and participating delivery partners.

We strive to do this in a variety of ways, knowing that schools really appreciate support to create meaningful connections with Country, their local Traditional Owner groups and implement genuine learning based on a journey of authentic experiences.

We strongly believe that understanding and respecting the care Traditional Owners have taken and continue to take in tending our precious waterway and catchments, is vital for students to grow connections to place and to share in the responsibility of care throughout their lives.

Thanks to funding from Agnico Eagle's Community Partnership Program, two regions were able to organise wonderful cultural initiatives for schools in 2025.



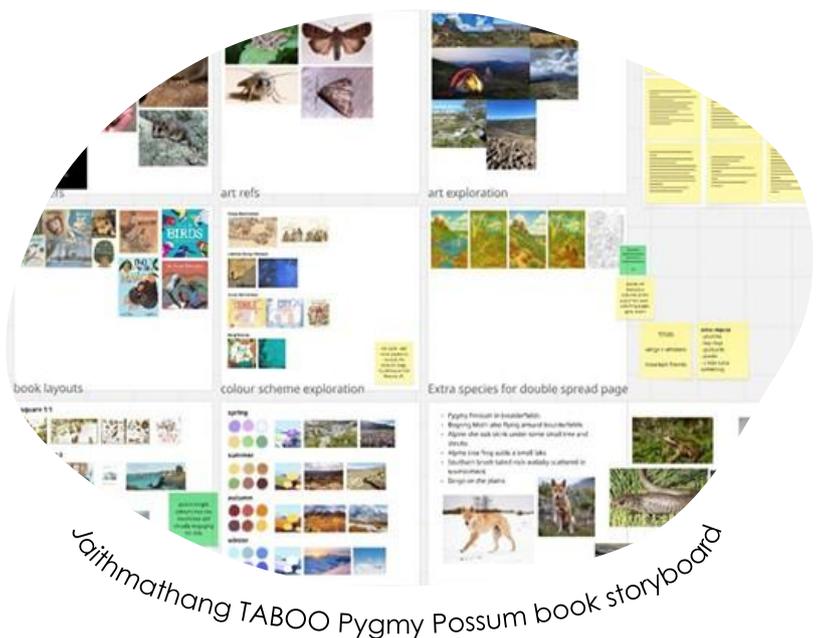
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

North East CMA region

Jaithmathang TABOO - Pygmy Possum cultural and education project

Funding engaged a professional illustrator to create a storybook to enable young primary school students to understand the unique story and significance of the Mountain Pygmy Possum.

The Mountain Pygmy Possum is not only an important part of the alpine environment but also holds deep spiritual and cultural meaning for the Jaithmathang people. Central to the project was the leadership of Jaithmathang Elder, Goengalla Yin Jumma Jumma, who holds extensive Traditional Knowledge of the species, its history, and its place in Aboriginal spirituality. This knowledge will go alongside some of the work that North East CMA and Jaithmathang have been doing with the Pygmy Possum and Bogong moth species in the Australian Alps to form a short, accessible story tailored for primary-aged students. The story, to be finalised in 2026, will be shared through both interactive school presentations and an illustrated storybook that students can take home, helping to extend learning beyond the classroom.



Cultural burn at Mullinmur Billabong

This project provides Galen Catholic College school students with the opportunity to learn cultural burn practices from Bangerang Aboriginal Corporation (BAC), developing their knowledge and skills in Country management.

Due to several constraints, the 0.5ha burn at Mullinmur Billabong Wangaratta has been rescheduled for the first half of 2026. It will help students understand how regular burns supported diverse groundcovers of native grasses and herbs, which improved soil health, reduced erosion, prevented destructive bushfires, and minimised sediment entering waterways.

It will also provide insight into how traditional burns performed by Bangerang Traditional Owners in the past would have limited blackwater events and fish kills because fuel loads across floodplains were carefully managed.



Proposed cultural burn area at Mullinmur Billabong

Students of Galen Catholic College have been involved in planning the delivery of the cultural burn with BAC's Ngalan Bitja (Our Fire) Ranger Team. The burn will enhance the health of Mullinmur Billabong, with students involved in post-burn monitoring.



Ngalan Bitja Ranger Team scoping proposed burn areas

North Central CMA region

Walking At Wirra-Lo

Grade three to six students from two River Detectives schools (St Joseph's Primary School Kerang and Gunbower Primary School) came together for a very special day of cultural and environmental learning at Wirra-lo wetland in Murrabit West on October 21.

Once a thriving wetland, the site was modified enormously post European occupation. In the early 2000's, previous owners Ken and Jill Hooper had a vision to return the site from paddock to wetland. They began working with the North Central CMA, Wetland Revival Trust and Traditional Owners on a raft of rehabilitation strategies. Wetland Revival Trust acquired the property for long term protection and restoration in 2023. The transformation has been nothing short of incredible.

Wirra-Lo wetland was the perfect location for schools to gather, learn about Barapa Barapa and Wamba Wamba cultures, of working together to heal country and the resilience of nature. Students enjoyed a shared Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony then a rotation of four activities throughout the day.



Wirra-Lo wetland, Murrabit West



Weaving with lignum with Aunty Marilynne Nicholls



Tracks and symbols with Kai Lane



Traditional uses of flora and fauna with Laura Kirby



Storytelling with Uncle Ron Murray

Ambling At Avoca

Students from five schools in the Avoca area (Avoca, St Arnaud, Natte Yallock, Bealiba, and Moonambel primary schools) gathered on the banks of the Avoca River for a variety of cultural and environmental activities on November 18.

The day was a collaboration between the River Detectives program (with funding from Agnico Eagle's Community Sponsorship Program), DJANDAK and DUMAWUL (enterprises of Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Corporation).

It was a great opportunity to share the Waterways of the West project with schools not currently involved with River Detectives. Waterways of the West is a collaboration between North Central CMA and Djandak to restore habitat values in the Upper Avoca catchment.

Djaara elder Uncle Jason Kerr involved students in a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony then students enjoyed a rotation of four activities during the day. As a result, one of these schools has now registered for the 2026 River Detectives program.



Students gathered by the Avoca River



Storytelling and artefacts with Uncle Jason Kerr

Waterbugs with North Central CMA staff (below)



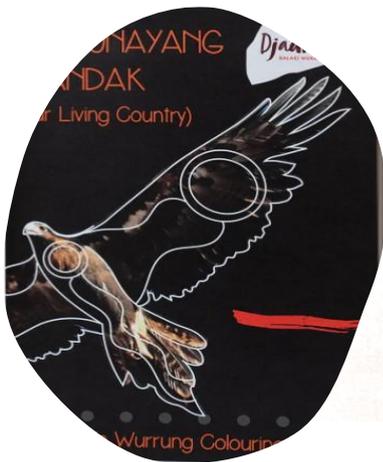
Native turtles with Graham Stockfeld of Turtles Australia (above)



Restoration work with Aunty Vicki Murray

Cultural resources

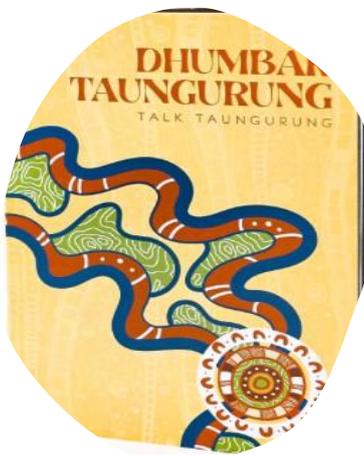
Funding from Agnico Eagle's Community Partnerships Program also enabled the North East and North Central CMA's to purchase cultural resources, many directly from Aboriginal Corporations, to distribute to River Detectives schools.



Dja Dja Wurrung Colouring books for schools on Djaara Country in the North Central CMA region



A5 language booklets, language posters and Laliwun Ganamburra (Sweet Lerp) picture story books in Taungurung Language and English for schools on Taungurung Country in the North Central and North East CMA regions.



'Cultural Knowledge of Australian Flora' booklets for schools across the state. This booklet has been written by young Yorta Yorta Barapa Barapa man Kai Lane from Habitat Warriors. It is a general guide to the way native flora is used for food, medicine, tools and ceremony designed especially for students.



Participation in community and collegiate events



Bendigo Sustainability Festival, March

Above: Inspiring young Eco Club members from Castlemaine Steiner School sharing their River Detectives



Fish Scientist For A Day Corangamite CMA, February

Above: Arthur Rylah Institute, Barwon Water and the Corangamite CMA River Detectives program provided fish habitat activities and fish survey demonstrations to Birregurra and Forrest Primary Schools.

NAIDOC Week Children's Day, Bendigo, July



Above: Hundreds of children visited the stall to emboss clay tiles native plants.

Community for Climate Resilience, Harcourt Valley Landcare, October



SPEAKER
NICOLE HOWIE
River Detectives Program Coordinator

Above: North Central CMA coordinator Nicole spoke at his Landcare information night.



Hope and Action Sustainability Education Day, Bendigo, September

Above: Hundreds of Grade 3/4 students gathered to attend four rotational sessions. River Detectives offered urban stormwater and waterbug activities.

Junior Rangers program, Serendip Sanctuary, July and October



Right: Parks Victoria's Serendip Sanctuary staff offer 'ponding' activities during their school holiday programs as part of their participation in River Detectives.

Statewide coordinator, Nicole Howie, presented a themed talk on the first day of the Australian Citizen Science Conference in Melbourne during October.

Addressing the conference theme, 'a catalyst for change', Nicole highlighted the inspiring examples of inquiry and community projects that schools complete using the River Detectives program as a springboard.



Left: An example highlighted at the conference; Victory Christian College students complete two years of science inquiry and participation in the Kennington Reservoir rehabilitation project, releasing endangered fish.



Australian Citizen Science Association Conference
A Catalyst for Change
Melbourne, VIC
13-15 October 2025