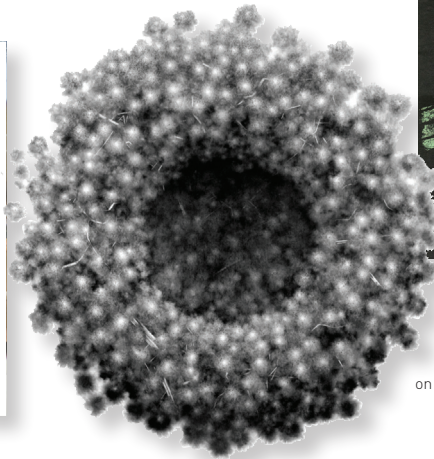


Wild Strathbogie at Euroa Primary School

Children, art and nature

by Penny Algar, Melbourne- and Euroa-based artist, gardener and secretary of the Strathbogie Ranges Conservation Management Network and Pauline Fraser, north-eastern Victoria-based artist and part-time visual art teacher at Euroa Primary School



above Natasha Craig, *Owl*, 2014, styrofoam print, 42 x 30 cm.

far left A group of students observing the stuffed animal collection from DEPI.

left Jonathan Delafield Cook, *Duck nest II*, 2010, charcoal on primed linen, 200 x 195 cm. 10cubed Collection, Melbourne. Courtesy Olsen Irwin. © the artist.

Five years ago, the founding members of the Strathbogie Ranges Conservation Management Network (SRCMN) met at a talk on how to make farm dams more frog friendly. The organisation developed a clear purpose around the protection and enhancement of biodiversity. It has initiated numerous community workshops and events aimed at increasing community awareness, as well as ground restoration works that help protect biodiversity in the Strathbogie Ranges region. The opportunity to work with artist and teacher Pauline Fraser and Euroa Primary School (EPS) students has been an important and successful aspect of the group's community engagement over the past three years. It is a collaboration that has developed organically with minimal discretionary arts specific funding and no script!

Wild Strathbogie was our most recent collaboration. A public exhibition of artwork by both children and adults was held in Euroa in November 2014 as part of the second Strathbogie Ranges Butterfly Festival, and received much acclaim from the community. The exercise gave children, as the future caretakers of our landscape, the opportunity to develop a love of and respect for nature. Challenging times are ahead and, while many unknowns exist around climate change scenarios, the ability to research, develop

an idea and express this through the visual medium of art is a useful and powerful tool. This article describes how the exhibition came about.

Penny Algar

Following the success of the first Butterfly Festival in 2012, discussions evolved with Penny Algar from the SRCMN to have another exhibition which would include not only butterflies but would feature artworks inspired by the Strathbogie Ranges: the landscape and the flora and fauna of the area. Penny organised with Dave Smith from the Department of Environment and Primary Industry (DEPI) in Benalla for our school to borrow quite a few of the preserved creatures they have in their collection. These included a phascogale, kookaburra, platypus, barn owl, blue-tongue lizard, red kite, sacred kingfisher, lesser-eared bat, antechinus, ring-tailed possum, and a squirrel glider. Dave also gave us some of the beautifully photographed brochures of birds, wild flowers, reptiles and fish for research purposes. The students really enjoyed studying these along with the actual creatures.

As the school's art room is lucky enough to have a big screen and a digital projector, we could also watch fantastic videos of creatures in the wild; these included frogs, barn owls, sugar gliders, kookaburras and bats. We also looked at images of contemporary artists' work, including the superb drawings of Johnathan Delafield Cook. His hyper-realistic drawings are astonishing. One of his specialities is drawing birds and nests. From these experiences and close studies it was as if we could really experience and understand the characteristics of our preserved 'friends' and appreciate their habitats, many of which are in our own backyards in north-eastern Victoria. The students really loved doing observational

drawings; to be able to study the scaly, patterned skin of the blue-tongue lizard up so close, the distinctive sharp beak, spiky feathered crest and beady eyes of the kookaburra gave the children plenty to work from and think about.

It was each student's personal choice how they were going to portray these creatures, and whether it would be in two or three dimensions. Quite a few students decided to make their creatures using papier maché, which is quite a lengthy process. One student was so inspired by the way in which the actual specimens were mounted on branches that she decided to do the same with her koala sculpture.

Printmaking was a major focus for the *Wild Strathbogie* theme. Drawings were carefully planned on butcher's paper then the image was drawn over with a pencil into the surface of a styrene sheet. Ink was rolled over the surface and then the image was printed onto different coloured papers. The final results were superb! Students were so excited about their printmaking that we used up all our supply of ink. The SRCMN has generously donated money so that we can buy more ink and continue. Students from foundation level to grade 6 have experienced printmaking this year.

Over the course of the project, artworks were portrayed in clay sculpture, relief prints on styrene, pencil drawings, dry pastel drawings, Indian ink paintings, tissue collage, papier maché sculptures and watercolour paintings. Our *Wild Strathbogie* theme was a very enjoyable and challenging experience. The students at EPS now have a far greater knowledge and appreciation of the fascinating wild creatures which live amongst us and as well as a greater understanding that we need to respect and care for their natural habitats. •

Pauline Fraser

Euroa Primary School staff and students would like to thank the Strathbogie Ranges Conservation Management Network for their fantastic support of our school's Visual Art program, for their encouragement, appreciation and assistance with materials and the staging of the *Wild Strathbogie* Exhibition.