

Neil Ormond: Our Local Environmental Hero



Catchment Champion

Andrew Smith, Caitlin Moir, Tyler Martin
and Ebony Phibbs

Corowa Public School



Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of the Murray Darling Association and Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between the Murray Catchment Management Authority and school students by providing opportunities for positive and authentic ventures that encourage students to develop creative solutions to natural resource management issues. www.murray.cma.nsw.gov.au/creative-catchment-kids.html

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre

The Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre is located in Burrumbuttock, north of Albury in southern NSW. Since 1995, the centre, which is adjacent to Burrumbuttock Public School, has provided opportunities for discovery and learning about the natural environment, the ecology of the local woodlands and the beauty of native plants. www.wirraminna.org

Murray Darling Association

The Murray Darling Association has membership of over 100 Local Government councils in the Murray-Darling Basin, as well as community groups, businesses and individuals with an interest in ensuring that the Basin continues as a valuable asset for all Australians. Since 1950, the Association has initiated various school and community education programs on managing the Basin's land and water resources. www.mda.asn.au



Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area. www.envirostories.com.au

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Teacher: Helen Duncan

School: Corowa Public School

Catchment Champions

In 2013, students involved in the Creative Catchment Kids program researched and wrote stories about 'Catchment Champions', people who have made important contributions to managing natural resources in their local community. The program was generously funded by the Murray and Murrumbidgee catchment management authorities.

The Catchment Champions books are part of the Enviro-Stories Education Program.



Catchment Management Authority
Murray



CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY



Catchment Management Authority
Murrumbidgee

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This story was written to share the inspiring journey of a teacher from Corowa Public School who had a vision to rejuvenate the native environment and a passion to teach children about their unique Murray River surroundings.





Where did it all begin?

Mr Neil Ormond, better known as Mr O, was born in 1956 in Lismore and grew up in Tuckurimba on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. Mr Ormond, went to a small school in Tuckurimba where his father was the principal and the only teacher at the school. Mr. Ormond's father was very interested in preserving the environment and taught a subject called 'Natural Science'. It was here that Mr. Ormond first began to learn about native plants, animals and the importance of sustaining the natural environment.

Mr Ormond began teaching at Corowa Public School 1978 until 1982. He then went overseas in 1983. When he returned in 1984, Mr Ormond took a teaching position at Barham Public School which he held for the next two years. Mr Ormond transferred to Corowa Public School in 1986 where he taught until he retired in 2013. In 1990, he attended a course on Co-operative Learning. This paved the way for Mr Ormond to combine his knowledge of teaching with his passion to preserve the native environment.

Mr Ormond wanted to get the children out of the classroom and teach them about the different native trees, flowers and grasses through 'hands on experiences' and teamwork. Equally important, he wanted children to be able to recognise different weeds that were threatening this very special region and for them to develop a sense of ownership of the land.



Stage 1: 1990-1992 The Environmental Area

Mr Ormond and Mr Grant Oliver worked together to create an area in the school where the students could go to see different native plants. Mr Oliver drew up plans and over the next two years the area was heavily planted.

Mr Ormond and Mr Oliver wanted students to learn the Aboriginal and the scientific names of different species as well as their common name. They wanted students to make leaf rubbings and observe the native birds and animals that would be attracted to the area. Students would learn about the different flowers and how to collect seeds for propagation.

Today the area is known as the Grant Oliver Environmental Area and is dominated by fully grown native species such as Banksias, Eucalypts, Cassuarinas, Callistemons, Leptospermons, Grevilleas, Acacias and Melaleucas. While this was a large project, it was just the beginning.

Stage 2 1999

In 1999, Mr Ormond, with the support of his wife Mrs Kerrie Ormond, applied for, and were successful in securing a grant through the Environmental Trust. This allowed them to commence work to transform five acres of wasteland full of weeds and rubbish, into a native environment that would encourage the rare species of Squirrel Glider back to the area.

The Squirrel Glider originally inhabited the area in large numbers. These animals rely on the Silver Wattle, *Acacia dealbata*. Students would be involved in the planting and ongoing maintenance of the area, as well as learning about bush tucker and rejuvenation of the land.



This task was a huge project that relied on many community groups such as Landcare, the Corowa Shire Council, Greening Australia and The Wangarratta Green Corp.

The Corowa Council brought in excavating equipment and cleared the entire area, leaving only the beautiful River Gums. They created different areas such as tiered banks towards the top of the hill and a flood plain at the bottom of the hill. The lower bank was planted out with hundreds of Silver Wattles (*Acacia dealbata*) and River Bottlebrush. The higher bank was planted with hundreds of Wattles, Busarias, Hopbush, Bush Pea, Butterbush and Saltbush. A path through the area was constructed so that students could visit this space regularly.



Today the area is a beautiful example of bush rejuvenation and is also used as the school's cross country track.



Stage 3 The Frog Pond

The next large environmental area that Mr Ormond transformed was the area inside the school grounds known today as the 'Frog Pond'. This area posed a danger to students as it reveals the school's history of being built on the original rubbish tip site. The area is covered in glass fragments and rubbish which is exposed after each rain.

Mr Ormond decided to turn this area, again from a waste land into a native strip for birds and small animals. The area was planted out with shrubs and the students created a frog breeding pond. The students made tin sculptures of frogs to decorate the area. Today the 'Frog Pond' is a very attractive area where birds and frogs frequent.

Reaping rewards of reinvigorating river





Stage 4 Environmental Gardens within the School Grounds

Mr Ormond initiated the creation of native gardens at the front and sides of the school. These gardens are thriving under the care of the students and the continued guidance of Mr Ormond and his wife Kerrie. Each Year, during National Tree Planting Day, the students from Kinder to Year 6 and Mr and Mrs Ormond add hundreds of plants to these existing garden beds.





Mr Ormond's Proudest Achievements

Over the years, Mr Ormond and the students of Corowa Public School have had an ongoing commitment to the environment through their involvement in Clean-Up Australia Day, National Tree Planting Day and the Murray Catchment Authority's Creative Catchment Kids Project. There have been many great memories along the way but one of the biggest highlights for Mr Ormond was in 2009. The Murray Catchment Natural Resource Management Awards recognised the outstanding achievement of Mr Ormond and the school's and community's commitment to the rejuvenation of the riverbank environment. The project was named as a Finalist in the Education Division.

Mr Ormond's Vision for the Future

"I would like to see:

- the shelter that is down the back of the school turned into an outdoor classroom for students to go and learn about Natural Science each week
- signs displaying the different plants, their seeds and their scientific names placed around the area
- students learning about weed damage in and around the Murray River and taking an active role in reducing the weeds
- students and the community transform the land adjacent to the Stage 2 project into a wetland
- continued participation in Clean-Up Australia Day, National Tree Planting Day and the Creative Catchment Kids Project.

Above all, I would like to see children growing up with an enjoyment and appreciation of native habitats and a sense of responsibility in sustaining this unique environment for future generations."





Andrew Smith, Caitlin Moir, Tyler Martin and Ebony Phibbs

2013 Year 6, Corowa Public School

The 2012 and 2013 Creative Catchment Kids writing program was showcased at the Seventh World Environmental Education Congress, held in Morocco during June 2013.



Catchment Management Authority Murray



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