Discovering ‘citizen science’

By MATTHEW CAWOOD
Group science and environment writer

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IENCE [s’n-s]: the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.

Who better to contribute to scientific understanding of Australia than the people out in the natural world, observing and shaping it: Landcarers? That idea underpins the “citizen scientists” theme of Landcare Week 2010, set to run from September 6 to 13.

Citizen science engages the public to observe changes in the natural world and report into a central information repository, which can then serve as a benchmark against which all future changes are measured.

For instance, last year’s RabbitScan operation collected information on rabbit densities, distribution and damage from 3400 sites around Australia—a invaluable resource for scientists wanting to check on shifts in rabbit populations in the future.

Landcare Australia’s chief executive, Heather Campbell, is also a director of Earthwatch Institute, an organisation that links conservation volunteers with environmental restoration projects.

Earthwatch’s latest initiative is ClimateWatch, a citizen science initiative that engages the public in observing changes in the natural world that might help scientists better understand the effects of climate change.

“The idea is to get a huge pool of data that scientists can then use to help determine what is actually happening,” Ms Campbell said.

“Landcarers, Coastcarers are out there as natural observers anyway. While they are out there doing their activities, they can get involved in feeding information back into the science community.”

Launched in October 2009, ClimateWatch is an ongoing program, and the plan is that it will run indefinitely to assess the depth of information that allows scientists to identify trends.

Landcare members who contributed to ClimateWatch or any of the range of citizen science programs—see box—were effectively contributing to the science that informed policy, Ms Campbell said.

In turn, that enhanced scientific and policy understanding could bolster the Landcare concept of community driven environmental repair.

“We’re trying to marry the science and the importance of the work being done there with an amazing community movement involving hundreds of thousands of volunteers,” Ms Campbell said.

“RabbitScan project manager, Jenny Thackaringa, Broken Hill, devised the idea, which is simple: wherever volunteers spot rabbits, they record back on the “three Es” — density, distribution and damage. Rabbit locations, and the associated reports, are then put on a Google Earth map to provide a graphic picture of rabbits in Australia.”

RabbitScan project manager, Jenny Qualey, said the program had been aiming for 3000 sites in 2009; it got 3400 before it ran out of funding.

Now the Federal Australian Pest Animal Management Program and some corporations, including Woolworths and Toshiba, have helped restart the program.

Ms Qualey said public input into the RabbitScan database would be an important factor in getting a replacement for the rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV, formerly known as rabbit calicivirus), now considered past its use-by date.

Waterwatch, www.waterwatch.org.au
RabbitScan, www.rabbitscan.net.au
Earthwatch Australia, www.earthwatch.org.au
Barbara Hardy Centre for Sustainable Urban Environment (Adelaide), www.urban.org.au/barbarahardy/research/citizen-science.asp

Groundwater
www.greenaust.gov.au

New phase in rabbit fight: the eyes have it

RABBITS are no longer the focus of stories of nature gone far, fast, but even at diminished numbers they continue to wreak havoc on the Australian landscape.

Just one rabbit per hectare can be enough to stop regeneration of all native plants, scientists have found. Across Australia, rabbits have been estimated to cost the nation $130 million a year in degradation and lack of biodiversity.

All of which makes a great case for Landcare Week involvement in RabbitScan, “a citizen science initiative” to map rabbits and their influence across Australia.

Last year the Rabbit Management Advisory Group (RMAG), under the chairmanship of David Lord, “Thackaringa”, Broken Hill, devised RabbitScan as a way of quantifying Australia’s rabbit challenge, to help scientists better address the issue and raise awareness among policymakers.

The idea is simple: wherever they are, people can survey local rabbit populations and report back on the “three Es” — density, distribution and damage. Rabbit locations, and the associated reports, are then put on a Google Earth map to provide a graphic picture of rabbits in Australia.

To recycle an old mobile phone, either hand it to a telco retailer or collection point (to find out where, go to www.mobilemuster.com.au or call 1300 730 070) or post them back in a red mailbox.

For more information about Landcare Week, visit www.landcareonline.com.au.

‘Hands’ get a lift: The ‘caring hands’ logo that has come to symbolise Landcare has been given a facelift.

The original design has become one of the most recognised symbols in Australia.

The new design for the Landcare, Junior Landcare and Coastcare logos retains the caring hands, but in a setting that reflects the 21st century. Along with the logo refresh, Landcare Australia has updated its style guide for groups and corporate partners wanting to incorporate the logos into publicity materials.

The style guide can be downloaded at www.landcareonline.com.au — look for the Media Centre under the Resources tab.
Sue and Sean Delaney were awarded the People’s Choice Award for their Sinclair’s Gully vineyard – the first advanced eco-certified vineyard in the Adelaide Hills.

Going green in the Adelaide Hills

WHILE Sinclair’s Gully might be one of Australia’s smallest wine producers, its conservation efforts are making a splash across the country. The Norton Summit vineyard took out the People’s Choice Award at the National Landcare Awards in Canberra.

Owners, Sean and Sue Delaney, were delighted to receive the accolade for their operation, which is the first advanced eco-certified vineyard and cellar door in the Adelaide Hills.

In the 2009-10 financial year, (Sinclair’s Gully) slashed its total emissions by 29 per cent after cutting 24pc from its greenhouse gas emissions and recording a 33pc drop in energy consumption between 2008 and 2009.

The People’s Choice Award is decided by an open vote, with members of the public encouraged to vote for their favourite Landcare project from the 88 national award finalists.

The Delaneys purchased their 10.5-hectare property at Norton Summit in 1997, after many years of searching for their dream bush retreat in the Adelaide Hills.

A year later, they established a one-hectare vineyard in an existing clearing, planting it to sauvignon blanc and chardonnay grapes.

Operating with a green mindset from the beginning, the couple’s attention soon turned to the environment surrounding their vineyard.

The Delaneys were concerned about the dwindling amount of natural vegetation left in the Mt Lofty Ranges. It is estimated less than 10 per cent of the natural vegetation remains, and most of that is found on private properties.

The Delaneys were determined to return their share to pristine condition. Enchanted by the majestic candlebark gums from the moment they first visited Sinclair’s Gully, the couple has worked tirelessly for the past 13 years.

In that time, they have turned an area overrun by two-metre high blackberry bushes into the woodland with the highest conservation rating in the Mt Lofty Ranges.

In recent years, their efforts have been rewarded with numerous environmental and tourism awards, including wins in the ecotourism and winery, distillery or boutique brewery tourism categories of the South Australian Tourism Awards.

As founding members of the local landcare group Friends of Moors Road, Mr and Mrs Delaney have been instrumental in getting the local community to think green.

Sinclair’s Gully is one of only two cellar doors nationally to have completed the advanced eco-certification accreditation program run by Ecotourism Australia.

In June the business completed the Climate Action Program to achieve the climate action innovator certification.

In the 2009-10 financial year, the business slashed its total emissions by 29 per cent after cutting 24pc from its greenhouse gas emissions and recording a 33pc drop in energy consumption between 2008 and 2009.

In order to further reduce their footprint, the Delaneys have implemented an environmental management system, which includes programs to collect all water from the site and recycle all materials used.

A solar electricity system has been installed, meaning more than two-thirds of the business’s electricity consumption is now generated on site.

Synthetic herbicides and pesticides have not been used for the past nine years, and native grasses have been planted between rows to encourage beneficial insects to repopulate.

By KIM CHAPPELL

WHEN deregulation hit the dairy industry in 2000 the Strong family, like many other farmers, thought about cutting their losses and moving west.

But instead they decided to stick it out - a choice which has turned their milkers into what are believed to be Australia’s highest yielding pasture-fed cows.

But it wasn’t achieved overnight, nor was it with Instant Genetics – instead Lynne, Michael and their son, Nick, set about improving their pastures and dairying to suit the environment and their cows.

They milk 400 cows, three times a day, across two properties, “Clover Hill” and Lemon Grove Research Farm, near Jamberoo, New South Wales, producing five million litres of milk a year.

This achievement was reached simply by “growing as much grass” as possible. Their hard work, and its environmental benefits was recognised when Clover Hill Dairies won the National Woolworths Primary Producer Landcare award for 2010.

Mrs Strong said the trait which put them over the line, above other farmers doing “phenomenal” things, was their involvement with the public.

Surrounded by an urban environment, they looked at what they were doing “from our neighbours point of view” like putting organic fertiliser out and recording a 33pc drop in energy consumption between 2008 and 2009.

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said “Clover Hill” was now one of Australia’s most water-efficient milk production systems producing 125,000 litres of milk per megalitre of captured water compared to the industry average of 3500 litres.

“Recognizing you have to be profitable to invest in your landscape and vice versa it became about keeping our eyes open for funding and being prepared to match what we were given dollar for dollar,” Mrs Strong said.

With half of the 100 hectares of “Clover Hill” high conservation value rainforest, the family made the decision to close it off to the cattle, only farming 50ha of land. This strategy meant upgrading lagoon, installing concrete causeways over waterways, and gravity-fed water troughs in all the paddocks.

Lemon Grove is the Strong’s “test” land — with up to 100 per cent of the effluent from the operation recycled onto 40pc of the pasture.

The pasture is 70pc Kikuyu base overplanted with annual rye/oats and 30pc perennial legumes, herbs and brassicas overplanted with annual rye/oats. This has reduced the feed gaps with the aim to have high quality pasture available all year round.

National Woolworths Primary Producer Landcare award winners, Lynne and Michael Strong holding their 2009 State Landcare Primary Producer Award, with their son, Nick, and school-based apprentice, Emma Visser, (both standing behind) on their farm, “Clover Hill Dairies”, Jamberoo, New South Wales.

The traditional slow pasture period of April to May no longer exists, allowing the Strong’s to produce more milk at this time and receive higher prices for it. “In winter we now have pasture that is equal to spring,” Mr Strong said.

“We the cows are responding well to it and the higher quality grass is lifting the fat and protein content of our milk.”

The Qantas Foundation proudly supports Landcare Australia since 2009 providing funds for community environmental projects. The funds are directed to Landcare and Coastcare groups who focus on water quality and conservation projects including the Southern Coastcare Association of Tasmania who restore vegetation adjacent to waterways and the ongoing training of Larrakia rangers in Darwin to accurately monitor water quality and its impact on Aboriginal food sources.

The Qantas Foundation proudly supports Landcare Week 2010. For more information visit www.landcareonline.com.au

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The Qantas Foundation proudly supports Landcare Week 2010. For more information visit www.landcareonline.com.au

focus boosts dairy profits

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Landcare volunteers go on camera

By SHEENA COFFEE

Waiting patiently for the film crew, Landcare volunteers stood on the sloping river bank at Lilydale Sanctuary, near Geelong, Victoria. At the call of “action”, they carefully picked their way through creeping underbrush as they made their ascent up the bank, leaving freshly planted trees in their wake.

Laughing and chatting, they worked for the camera, re-tracing steps and halting under various directions as film crew darted through the bush in search of a perfect shot.

The Sanctuary was just one location on a two-day shoot described as a “call to arms” by Landcare Australia Limited chief executive officer, Heather Campbell.

“Landcare is an amazing movement with amazing achievements,” Ms Campbell said.

“And for it to continue to have such great achievements on the ground, it needs people to get involved.”

The ad will be launched during Landcare Week (September 6 to 13) and will be accompanied by print and radio advertisements.

It will detail people from a diverse range of work: backgrounds and age groups climbing into a donation tin which will then be deposited in rural settings, with the intent of persuading people to donate their time, skills and knowledge.

This advertisement has been funded by the Federal Government under a Caring for our Country Grant and by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) in Victoria.

Ms Campbell said DSE and Landcare hoped the advertisement would result in a further lift in membership.

“It will help us target people we haven’t traditionally been involved with,” she said.

“There are still huge challenges for Landcare, such as demographic change and property turn-over.

“Recruitment is not something you do once and the job is done.

“We need to continue getting people thinking about the environment and ways they can make a positive contribution.”

She said Landcare would welcome skills-based volunteers who would be able to assist with book-keeping, or website management, for instance.

For Bronte Payne, who has been involved with Landcare for 20 years and is the Geelong network co-ordinator, involvement has been a labour of love.

During four years in the early 1990s he planted 19,000 trees and has now welcomed back various bird species, wallabies and echidnas.

He said there were always challenges in front of groups such as the one he co-ordinates and that despite their continual work to improve remnant vegetation, there was still a net loss of native vegetation.

“We need to constantly be putting new stuff back in the landscape to offset losses.”

His network has long been involved in rabbit-baiting and restoration, revegetation and removal of woody weeds along the Barwon and Moorabool rivers and also Hovels Creek.

More volunteers and members would mean many things to his network, Mr Payne said.

Projects followed people, he said and in turn corporate and school interest.

“If you have projects on-going, you have a level of operation and support which comes with it.”

But a base level of funding was required to ensure a critical mass of projects and on-ground works, Mr Payne said.

“If I have schools who want to participate in a tree planting day, I need on-ground works.

“But if I can’t buy trees or don’t have landholders engaged, it grinds to a halt.”

Mr Payne said he would like to see the Landcare lobby become a stronger voice and have an impact on government direction, policy making and attract a greater share of the funding pie.

The Geelong network was currently relying on state level funding which came in regular instalments.

He said to remain viable, the network needed about $100,000 a year.

The New National Landcare Directory

connecting landcare and coastcare volunteers

Register your landcare/coastcare group

The new directory has been purpose built so that it is easier for groups to use. It will also capture the various project types that groups are working on all over Australia. You are encouraged to register if your group is involved in volunteer community environment projects including: landcare, coastcare, sustainable farming, trends of groups, bushcare, rivercare, Junior Landcare (eg: schools, scouts and other youth groups).

Grants available!

For a limited time, Landcare Australia will offer 20 x $1,000 grants to the groups who register by September 6th - the first day of Landcare Week. The winning grant recipients will be selected at random from the database and announced on landcareronline.com.au.

Benefits of being on the National Landcare Directory:

• Volunteers can easily find your group
• Ability to promote your events such as working bees and planting days
• Connections with other groups can be easily made
• Your projects can be showcased
• Potential corporate sponsors can find groups for local community sponsorship
• You can easily apply for grants managed by Landcare Australia

www.landcareronline.com.au
Holden revs up environment support

By MATTHEW CANN

HOLDEN, a legendary Australian brand, has joined forces with another great Aussie brand, Landcare, to enable some important environmental repair projects across Australia.

Holden dealers from Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria have swung their support behind Landcare Australia to help restore natural habitats in local communities.

The project, known as Holden Habitats, will include creeks restoration, weed control and revegetation programs, foreshore vegetation, bushland recovery, habitat restoration for native species and water purifying floating islands.

The Holden Habitat program is the first step to creating an environmental program that can be adopted by Holden dealerships around Australia.

“Holden Habitats allows the company to give funding to Landcare Australia for a local project over the next 12 months and provides the opportunity for the Landcare Holden team to donate their time at the local Landcare project site,” Holden’s Phill Brook said.

The Holden Habitat program is the first step to creating an environmental program that can be adopted by Holden dealerships around Australia.

“As a company, we are trying to create an environment better for all Australians, by building cars that use less fuel, have lower emissions and remain affordable for motorists. “This is a great opportunity for our many customers to hard to protect and repair local environmental issues.”

Paul Davies said his dealership had worked closely with Landcare Australia and Holden GM to bring the Holden Habitat project to fruition.

“We want to show our customers and the community that we take the health of the environment and our waterways seriously,” Mr Davies said.

“Holden Habitats allows the company to give funding to Landcare Australia for a local project over the next 12 months and provides the opportunity for the Landcare Holden team to donate their time at the local Landcare project site.”

Qantas Foundation targets long-term water projects

GREEN credentials are not just a flying thought at Qantas.

The company takes seriously its commitment to the environment and sustainability, and also to providing volunteering opportunities for its employees.

For two years the Qantas Foundation – the company’s charitable trust – has been involved with Landcare Australia Limited and will this year step up its commitment to become the official corporate sponsor of Landcare Week, September 6 to 13.

Chief executive officer of the Foundation, Shirley Davies (pictured), said the relationship had been regarded as much more than “just a good thing to do.”

“Qantas takes great pride in supporting the iconic natural assets of Australia and we are involved in ensuring, through Landcare, their work helps protect these natural assets.”

Qantas staff involved in the Green Team in 2005 and its steadily growing membership – 1000 employees to date – has shown the strong desire of staff to become involved with volunteering work.

“Landcare is a national movement and it’s a really good thing for our staff, who are located across the country, to be able to support.”

Last year Green Team members and Qantas staff were seen paddling through Sydney waterways as part of Landcare Week’s Source to Sea event and Ms Davies said it had provided an opportunity for fun, but also to raise awareness of very important issues.

During the previous two years, the Qantas Foundation has committed $100,000 to Landcare annually.

Through its sponsorship, Qantas Foundation has been involved with water quality, salinity and waterway protection projects in the Northern Territory, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia.

Included in the projects has been the training of Larrikin Rangers based at Darwin in the Northern Territory. Rangers have been learning how to accurately monitor water quality in Darwin Harbour, focusing on the impact of water quality on key Aboriginal food sources such as shellfish.

This project will join another water project in the Swan and Canning Rivers in Western Australia, and funding will also enable Landcare and Coastcare groups in Southern Tasmania to restore vegetation adjacent to waterways greatly affected by environment damage.

Ms Davies said the foundation was keen to focus its sponsorship on water sustainability because of the long-term requirements of such projects.

Landcare Australia’s partnerships manager, Shivan Jayasinghe said the ongoing Landcare Week would celebrate the Landcare movement’s volunteers and the “amazing contribution they have made to the Australian landscape”.

The theme for Landcare Week, in the organisation’s 21st year, is ClimateWatch.

“Information recorded by Australians about what’s happening in their local area will be used by scientists across Australia to help them better understand and document our changing climate.”

- SHEENA COFFEY

2010 National Landcare Awards Winner

Westpac Education Award

Western Australia’s Baldwins Primary School’s innovative educational programs provide a unique learning experience for 30 schools in the Perth metropolitan area. The project evolved through a determination to preserve the region’s fast diminishing natural environment.

Over 3000 students from kindergarten to year 12 participated in the Forest Programs in 2009 alone. The project aims to empower and educate local young people to become proactive and effective in their efforts to achieve environmental sustainability in their communities.

To nominate your school for the 2011 State and Territory Landcare Award, Westpac Education Category visit

www.landcareonline.com.au

Proudly supported by:

Landcare Australia

THE LAND | Thursday, August 26, 2010 | 5
Night of nights for Landcare winners

The National Landcare Awards, held at Parliament House on June 24, celebrated the work of volunteers from across Australia who are making a significant contribution to the environment.

Australia’s 88 finalists were recognised and among them 13 were announced winners.

The winning projects ranged from sustainable farming initiatives to education programs teaching the next generation about environment sustainability.

Landcare Australia’s corporate sponsors were also recognised for their support of the community and its projects.

Erin Rowe (centre), Hawkesbury, NSW, Young Landcarer Award winner, with Alex Muir from Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority and actor, Jack Thompson.

Coastcare winners from Warrnambool and Point Danger, Victoria, Don McTaggart, Kate McInnes, John Sutherland, Kristie King, Chris Drummond and David Williams.

Westpac’s Graham Jennings and Sally Kirkwright with John Worthy, Courtney Brown, Tegan Tregonning and Judith Hill from Baldivis Primary School, Baldivis, WA.

Individual Landcarer Award national winner, Kate McLaren, with Agriculture Minister, Tony Burke.

Laura Berry from Leighton Holdings with Shandell Cummings and Justin Bellanger from South Coast Natural Resource Management, South Coast, WA.

Landcare Ambassador and MC for the night, Catriona Rowntree with students from Tasmania’s Deloraine High School.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Minister for Sustainable Population, Tony Burke, delivering the keynote speech for the night.

Chairman of Landcare Australia, Jerry Ellis, celebrating the achievements of the 88 finalists.

Maria Weeding, Melanie Kelly, Helen Scott and Helen Geard, Little Swanport, Tasmania, who won the Community Group award, with Jack Thompson (second right).

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Help the environment by reducing your printed investor communications. It’s easy!

Choose electronic delivery for your investor communications and reduce the amount of paper waste associated with your printed investor communications.

For each registration a donation of up to $2 is made to Landcare Australia. Initiatives focus on reforestation and revegetation projects, the establishment of habitat and wildlife corridors and the reduction of salinity and nutrient runoff into waterways.

Register at www.etree.com.au
MORE than 300 guests gathered at Canberra’s Rydges Lakeside Hotel to attend presentations by the 88 national Landcare award finalists on 24th June. It was an opportunity for the finalists to share about their projects, achievements and their Landcare journey.

The event was a great success with new relationships among Landcare groups formed, exchange of ideas and encouragement to continue the good work.

Karen Stuhmcke, Merilyn Stephan, Linda Ruthenberg and Caitlin Ruthenberg of Gatton State Primary School, Queensland Westpac Education Award finalists.

From Little Things Big Things Grow.

Coles is proud to help schools and community groups establish their own garden in partnership with Junior Landcare.

If your school or community group would like to apply or find out more information, please visit www.juniorlandcare.com.au/coles
In Brief

Buy online: A one-stop-shop for Landcare, Coastrace and Junior Landcare merchandise is now online.

The shop has been set up as a resource for groups wanting to buy or create t-shirts, caps, banners and other Landcare kit.

There are options to personalise your t-shirts with your group’s logo, or if you need an item that is not in the shop, you can always contact the store to make a request for a special purchase.

All items can be purchased at cost price. Landcare Australia does not make a profit from any purchase.

The store will stock pins, caps made from 65 percent recycled PET bottles, stickers, brimmed hats, t-shirts, and aluminium water bottles, among other things.

The shop can be found at www.landcareonline.com.au

Online relaunch: Landcareonline.com.au has been re-launched with a new look, new content, and new ways of getting around and finding information.

The new site has been designed for easier navigation for Landcare and Coastrace groups, volunteers and corporate partners.

It also aims to create a platform for the exchange of ideas and projects among the Landcare and Coastrace communities.

The site now offers the tools needed to start a new group, or write a media release.

Links to past Landcare awards have been included, to inspire new nominees and projects. Case studies are continuously being uploaded to provide similar inspiration.

Landcareonline also links to the new National Landcare Directory, which makes searching for a local group easier, and will help groups interact and apply for grants managed by Landcare Australia.

People can also register on the website to receive Landcare Australia e-newsletters.

A new framework: A proposal drafted by the Australian Framework for Landcare Reference Group, made up of Landcare members who work to ensure views expressed by the Landcare community during the consultation period are accurately reflected, will be released by the Australian Landcare Council and appointed Kim Oune as its chairman.

Mr Chance is a former minister for agriculture, fisheries and forestry, and has advocated the Australian Landcare Council and appointed Kim Oune as its chairman.

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He said while the contents of the final draft of the framework will be kept under wraps until the September announcement, it is intended as a guide for landcarers.

By HELEN WALKER

Growing healthy school kids

By MATTHEW CADOW

COLES shoppers who have chosen re-useable bags over plastic bags have helped fund about 800 Junior Landcare school gardens.

An alliance between the supermarket and Landcare Australia, which started in 2008, means every time a shopper buys a green bag with the ‘Caring hands’ logo, a portion of the proceeds is donated to a Junior Landcare school garden project.

Last financial year, Coles gave out 440 grants worth $1000 to $1500 each, according to M-ajella Allen, Coles Community and Sustainability manager.

The benefits cut both ways, Ms Allen said.

School children get to reconnect with food at its source, and understand the connections between soil, environment and themselves.

They get out of the classroom.

At Garran Primary School in the Australian Capital Territory, teacher Fiona Coles said, “We appreciate the opportunity the funding has given us to achieve the goal of a sustainable vegetable garden.

Children in the garden at Gunntt Children’s Centre, Milton, on the New South Wales South Coast.

We talked about looking after ourselves, the importance of the earth ... nurturing the seeds and plants to grow strong which is like us taking care of ourselves to grow healthy and strong.

- Program facilitator, Fran Dobie

When I walk past it, I think ‘Wow, I did that!’

In return, Coles staff get to visit schools and develop connections with the local communities.

Successes are reported back through Coles’ newsletters, “and help engender a sense of pride in the business.”

Most school gardens are linked to the school’s environmental curriculum.

That concept further opened up this year, when Coles expanded its donations program around the “premium natural” jute bags.

The proceeds go toward developing Indigenous gardens in preschools.

These gardens are helping children appreciate the importance of plants as living things and their connection with the earth and the land, according to Fran Dobie, facilitator of the Indigenous Gardens Program.

“We all danced around the campfire and role-played the lifespan of a plant,” she said of one recent event.

“We talked about looking after ourselves, the importance of the earth, our Mother and linking it with seed, water, air, sun, growth — nurturing the seeds and plants to grow strong which is like us taking care of ourselves to grow healthy and strong.”

Ms Allen said the Landcare link is also important in other ways.

It has become a vehicle for Coles’ other environmental programs, like raising awareness of plastic bag recycling and rendering the reusable shopping bag lines.

More information about Junior Landcare grants can be found at www.juniorlandcare.com.au/grants.htm

Sunny challenge on for junior landcarers

SOME people compete with cattle, some with tomatoes, others for the biggest pumpkin.

Yates is raising the flag on a children’s sunflower competition — who can grow the tallest, or get the largest head, or take the most creative sunflower photo.

The Yates Junior Landcare Sunflower Challenge is a successor to last year’s hugely successful Yates Junior Landcare Pumpkin Challenge, in which almost 20,000 children competed to grow the largest pumpkin.

The group winner was the M’grafh family from Toowoomba, Queensland, with a 175kg whopper, while the individual winner was Boyd Wales from Walcha in rural New South Wales with an impressive 94kg pumpkin.

“The previous challenges we have run in conjunction with Junior Landcare have been hugely successful,” said Judy Horton, Yates’ communications manager.

“We hope with this challenge we will continue to encourage and foster a new generation of junior gardeners.

“We also hope the participants will enjoy discovering their green fingers and seeing the results of their labour.”

Chief executive officer of Landcare Australia, Heather Campbell, said the not-for-profit organisation was delighted to be able to provide encouragement and support to all young budding gardeners out there, “and to help educate them on the importance of growing produce and the environmental benefits achievable from sustainable gardening practices.”

Children under 16, schools and youth groups are being invited to take part in the challenge.

Participants can register on the Yates Junior Landcare Sunflower Challenge website to receive their free giant sunflower seeds, which they can plant in late October or early November and monitor their progress over the spring and summer months.

Kids can grow their sunflowers at home or at school, but will need to care for their plants during the hot summer weather.

They are also required to log onto the Yates Junior Landcare Sunflower Challenge website once their flower has reached maturity to update the size of their giant sunflower and upload a photograph. The final winners will be announced in March 2011.

Yates is also working with Junior Landcare by providing grants to help schools and youth groups undertake School Environmental Management Plans.

Schools and youth groups across the country can apply for these grants by visiting www.juniorlandcare.com.au

Anyone interested in taking part in the Yates’ junior Landcare Sunflower Challenge can register at www.juniorlandcarechallenge.com.au

- MATTHEW CADOW