

Diocesan e-News

AWARD FOR 'BIODIVERSITY SECONDARY SCHOOL OF THE YEAR'

Damascus College Ballarat is proud to have been awarded the 'Biodiversity Secondary School of the Year' at the Victorian Government's ResourceSmart Schools Awards in Melbourne on Friday, November 11. This ResourceSmart program helps schools take action on climate change and incorporate sustainable activities into school curriculum.

This was awarded for the development of the Damascus College Murnong Trail, which is an 800 metre biodiversity trail that winds through the bushland of the Damascus College fifty acre site. This trail was developed to increase the school community awareness of the bountiful bushland and to ensure its conservation and it will be used as a resource across several disciplines including Science and Humanities. The murnong plant was discovered in the bushland and due to the rarity and its significance to the Wadawurrung people, the trail was named in honour of the humble murnong.

As a Catholic school, Damascus College encourages in its faith development programme an attitude of stewardship of the environment, and this is put into practice in several ongoing conservation projects around Ballarat as part of the College's Christian Personal Development Award.



Sarah Boswell – Leader of Community Development

ResourceSmart Schools Awards winners announced

Many Victorian schools and early childhood services had a very memorable experience last Friday as the winners of the ResourceSmart Schools Awards 2016 were revealed at the IMAX Theatre Melbourne Museum.

ResourceSmart Schools (RSS) helps schools benefit from embedding sustainability into everything they do and take action on climate change. It provides a common framework, facilitation support, professional learning and resources to assist schools to minimise waste, save energy and water, enhance biodiversity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. RSS also rewards and recognises students, teachers and schools for sustainability achievements through Sustainability Certification and the annual RSS Awards. Many schools across our Ballarat Diocese participate in the RSS program and have gained Sustainability Certification.

A number of Catholic schools across the state were nominated for awards this year, including Damascus College Ballarat which was awarded the winning prize for Biodiversity Secondary School of the Year. Damascus won this award for the 800 metre Murnong Trail which it has established through the grounds of the college. It was developed to not only increase the school community's awareness of the bountiful bushland, but to conserve and protect the indigenous plants - in particular the Murnong yam daisy.

It was a day of celebration for more than 350 students, teachers and people in the sustainability education community who applauded the incredible showcase of school stories for a beautiful planet.

There were plenty of laughs with Comedian Josh Earl and Totally Wild presenter Natalie Hunter hosting the event - and an opportunity to learn something new with Melbourne Museum running education workshops for the finalists.

Congratulations to all winners, finalists and entrants for being involved - we look forward to reading the next chapter in your sustainability story book!

Dr Susan Crowe - Education Officer: Sustainability, Liturgy and Special Projects, Catholic Education Ballarat

Below is an article printed in *Our Diocesan Community* in July, 2016 on the Murnong Trail.

Origins



Since the 1960s, staff at what is now Damascus College have been aware of the beauty of the native bush on its Mount Clear site. The move to create a biodiversity trail was prompted by Damascus Sustainability Coordinator, David Neate's attendance at a professional development session on Indigenous Agriculture held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne in 2012. A feature of the session was the great importance to the first Australians of the yam daisy or murnong, which was cultivated by their women. A couple of months later, David was stunned to discover a sizeable patch of murnong growing in the bush at Damascus. It

was once found widely across western Victoria, but most has disappeared under the onslaught of exotic pasture and grazing livestock.

Creating the Trail

Together with our (then) Sustainability Coordinator, Justin Brennan, David prepared a grant application in April 2014 for Communities for Nature funding, which successfully gained \$10,000 to pay for trail materials, signage and plants. Preparation for the Trail involved a range of groups and individuals. Student Amelia Johnson put her art skills to work to provide beautiful line drawings for the stations along the Trail. Wadawurrung staff were generous in their provision of information about Indigenous use of plants and the significance of key species, and energised the group by their enthusiasm for the project. On a practical front, the College groundsman cleared a large number of wildling pines from the bush, and there was tremendous support from the College's (student) Green Group, from staff members and from College family members. Several working bees saw large piles of fallen timber tidied up, weeds controlled, and finally 500 specimens of indigenous trees, herbaceous plants and grasses were planted.



Opening the Trail

The Trail was opened in November 2015, with a smoking ceremony led by Uncle Bryon Powell and prayers led by Sr Therese Power. It has been used by classes as diverse as French, Science and English, and offers an introduction to the culture of the Wadawurrung for our Humanities students. Its value as a reflective walk is appreciated by individual staff members as well.

The future



Damascus College aims to provide QR code links at the various stations along the Trail to websites for topics such as animal and bird identification and nesting box design. The long-term goal for sustainable management of the bush that surrounds the Trail is to initiate a mosaic-burning programme, providing bushfire protection for the College and renewal of the bushland, and honouring the wisdom of Indigenous agriculture.

Public use of the Trail is limited by its situation at the back of the College, but if you would like a guided tour, we would be happy to oblige.

Significance to the College

The Year of Mercy, with its call to hear “the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth”, has brought renewed focus on the stewardship of nature for its intrinsic worth. The humble yam daisy is a resilient symbol of the rich biodiversity that was on campus before the gold rush, and of the agricultural husbandry of the land by the traditional owners – an aspect of their culture which had been largely ignored. It’s so appropriate that it should be the logo for the Wadawurrung, and Damascus proudly displays this logo on the information sign for the Trail.

David Neate - Sustainability Coordinator

Photo 1: Damascus College sustainability coordinator David Neate and year 12 student Claire Roberts at the Murnong Trail.

Photo 2: the Murnong

Photo 3: Beautiful drawings for the trail

Photo 4: the trail