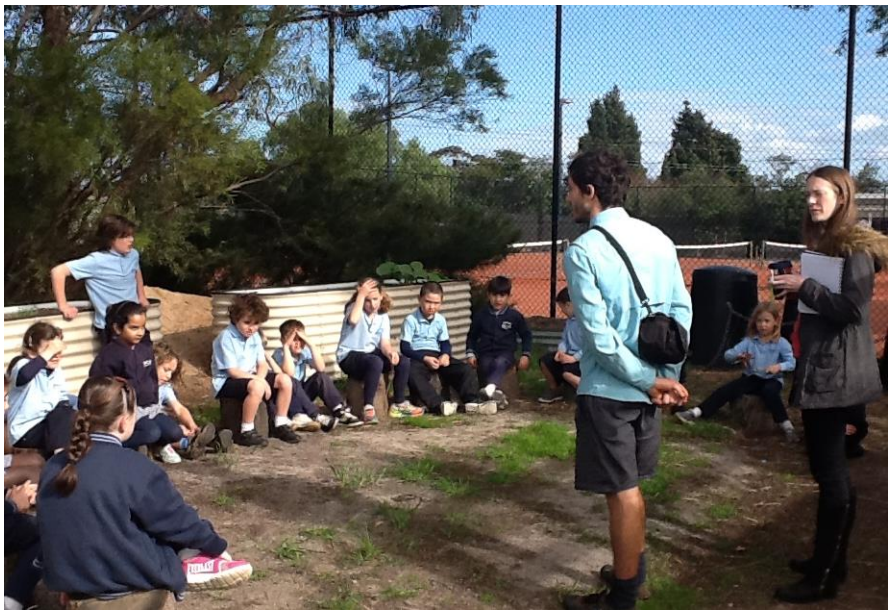
Fauna Discovery at Moorabbin Primary School

18th May 2016

Gio Fitzpatrick, Youth Wildlife Ambassador, Port Phillip Eco Centre

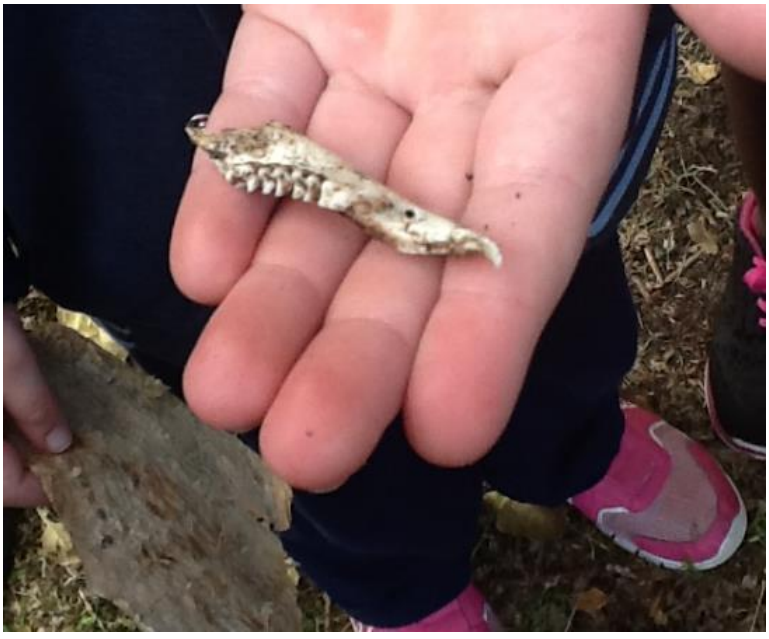
Weather: slightly overcast, with sunny patches, no rain.

Three groups of Grades 1/ 2 were each taken for an "investigation" for over 1 hour

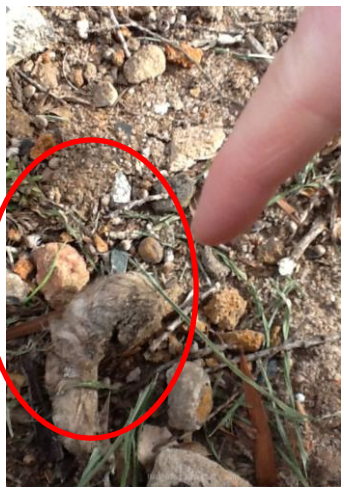


Using a keen sense of sight, smell, touch and hearing here are the 37 species we found:

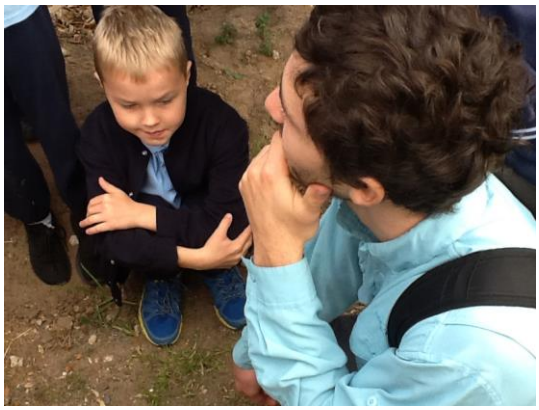
Brush tail possum – students found a jaw bone which was identified as possum. Gio encouraged students to smell a rusty mark on a certain tree to see if we could smell brush tail possum scent. We also saw a disused dray (nest).



Red Fox – we saw footprints in the mud near the chicken coup, spotted two scats (poo) which had lots of fur in it suggesting the fox had been eating small fury creatures, and identified a possible fox den (house)....



Fox scat



Pondering the fox scat

Possible fox den

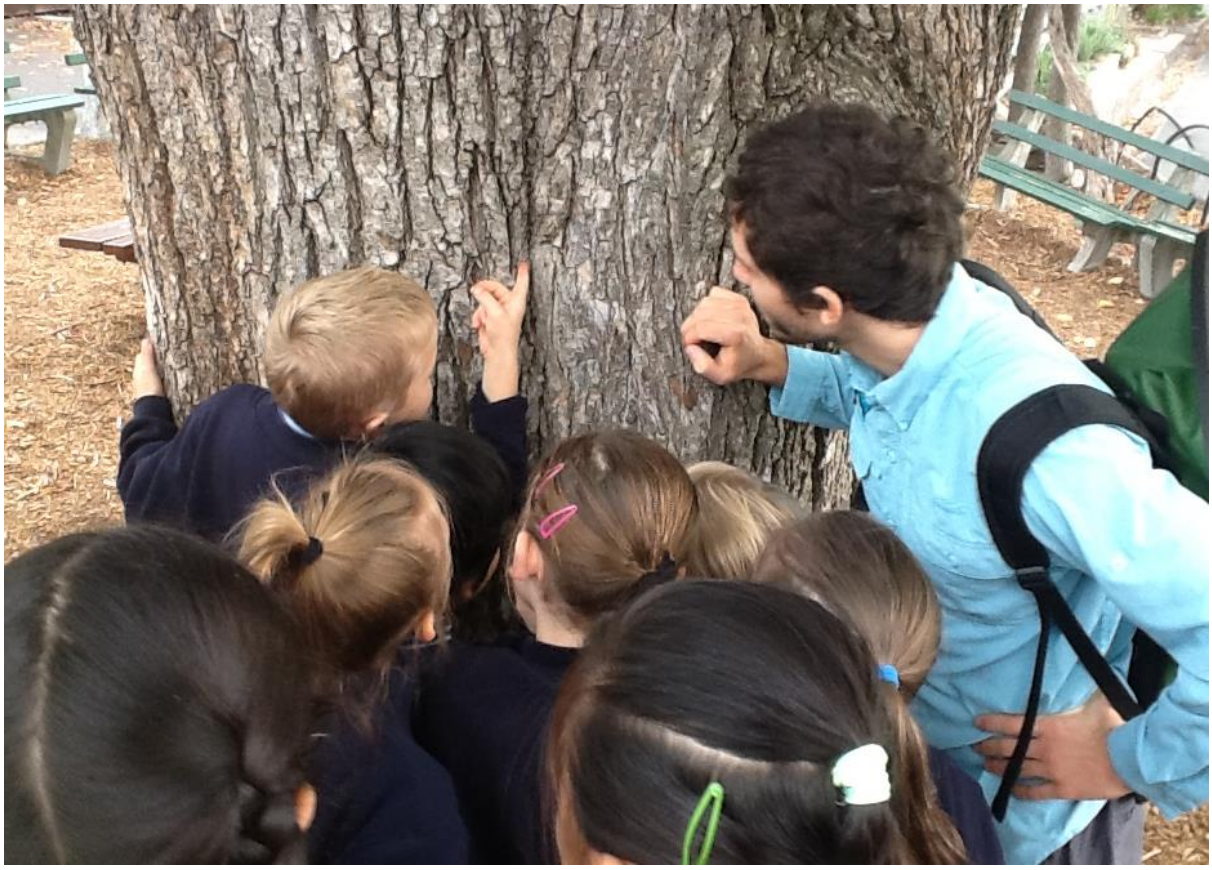
Rat – dead, spotted up by the chook shed (this got removed)

Native cockroach – there are hundreds of species of cockroach

Clynotis jumping spider – found in the sun on a tree. Did you know most spiders have four eyes?

Native jumping spider – there are many kinds of jumping spiders – we saw several types on the one tree

Dutch Elm Beetle – tiny beetle that only feeds on the English Elm tree leaves. The leaves of the elm saplings were covered in holes which had been eaten by the insects.



Look closely at any tree.

Be amazed at how many different kinds of insects, larvae, webs and cacoons you will find.

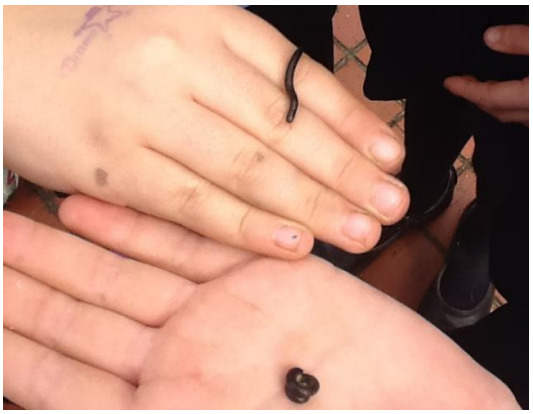
Sugar Ant – found on the branch of a tree

Iridomyrmex - or the rainbow ant (referring to its blue-green iridescent sheen). It is a native ant to Australia

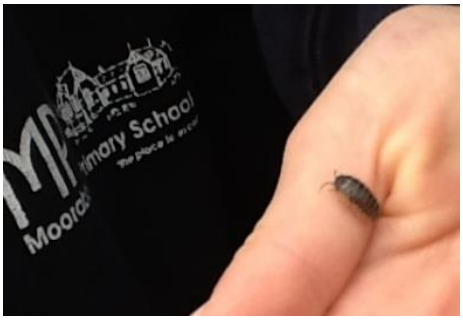
Lace wing (eggs) – White eggs found in a crack on the bark of a tree. When hatched these delicate insects have a greenish-brown body and translucent wings.

European honey bee – happily buzzing around the Correa and Hakea. It's too cold for the native bees now.

Portuguese Millipede – frequently found under pots in the garden, and in brick cracks. Curl into ball when scared. Millipede means 'thousand feet', they don't really have that many - the numbers range from 30 pairs to about 350 pairs. We didn't count them!

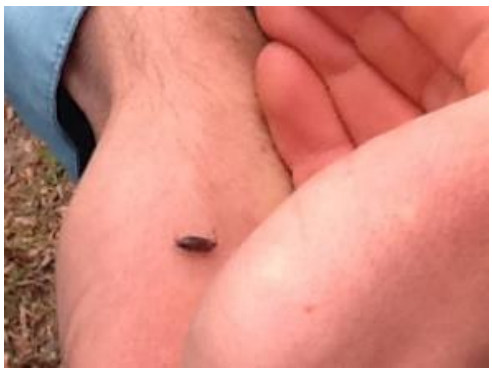


Pill Bug – this creature is rounded, has 14 legs, and will roll up into a ball to protect itself. Did you know it is actually a crustacean!



Slater – we found these in moist dark areas, this is flatter in appearance than the Pill Bug

Earwig - found on the bark of a tree



Springtail larvae – from 0.25 to 6mm in size this lavae was spotted by a student in a crevice in the bark. The larvae is a tiny white dot on the end of a fine single hair. No longer considered an insect, springtails are one of the main biological agents responsible for the control and the dissemination of soil microorganisms.

Footman moth (cacoon) – these moths like damp dark areas, and the cacoon was found in this tree knot where lichen and algae were growing.

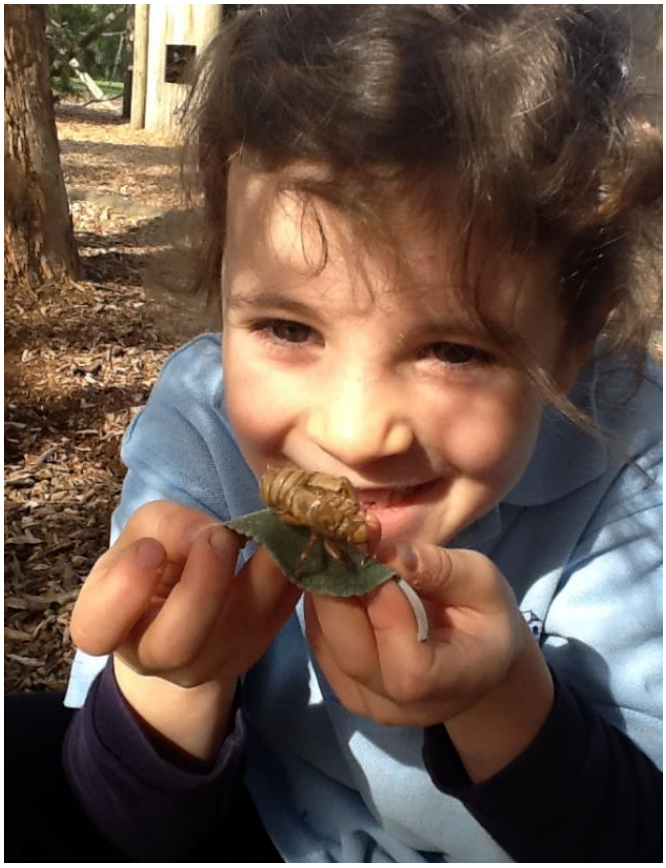
Darkling beetle larvae – some students recognised this as a mealworm, which they had been learning about in Science. Well done. Found on a tree – in a knot hole. This yellow banded larvae will turn into a black beetle.

Black armed spider – we did not pick this spider up!

Dark Winged Fungus Gnat – dark thin insect around 7mm long. Eats fungus. Did you know there are currently, around 1700 species identified, but an estimated 20,000 species are estimated to be waiting to be discovered!!

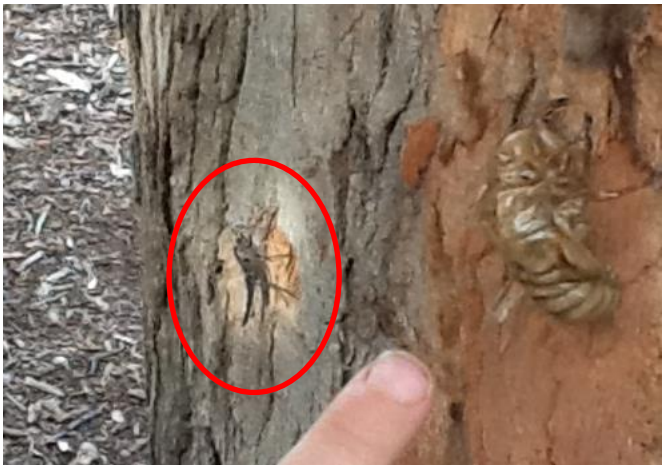
Look what I've found!

Cicada shell – located on ground amongst leaf litter. Gio explained how the Cicada lives underground for 7 years and then comes to the surface only to live for two weeks. Funny to think that the Cicada that lived in this shell was older than Isabel in the picture!



Fly – sat on bark of tree in sun and did not move

Wingless soldier fly – no wings on Females (shown below with Cicada to show size)



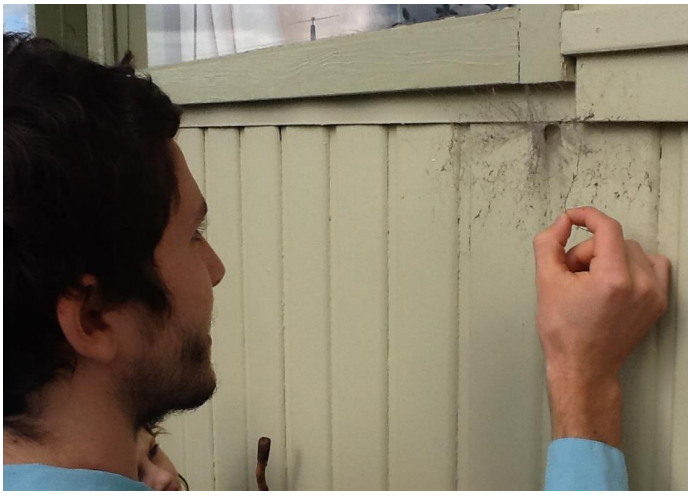
Snail – found eating rainbow chard in the vegetable patch!!

Eureopis spider – this spider was found on a tree. It only eats ants. Gio told us how the spider is unusual as it runs circles around its prey (ant) spinning a web, and as it does so it sets a trap

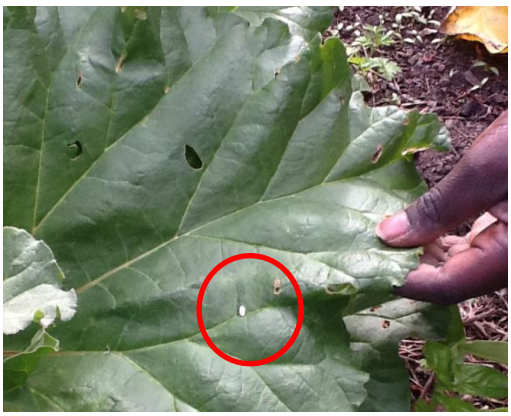
Red Headed Pasture Cockchafer – shiny black beetle spotted again on the bark of a tree.

Praying Mantis egg sack – firmly attached egg case with lots of miniature holes where the insect has come from

Black house spider – Gio gently vibrating the spider web to trick the black house spider to come out



Mealybug egg – found on rhubarb in vegetable patch



Worm - Found under pot in moist environment , quickly wriggled away

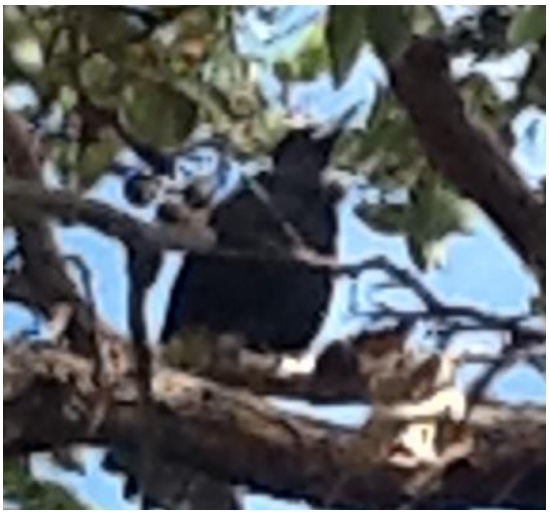
BIRDS

Silver Gull – spotted flying overhead, probably on the way to the beach (native habitat not at school)

Grey Butcherbird – heard the call of the butcher bird

Rainbow Lorikeet – heard the chatter and saw the birds feeding on a nearby flowering gum tree.

Magpie – sat in gum tree and sang to us whilst we inspected for insects below



Wattle bird – heard the call, saw it fly past

Indian Miner – heard their 'alarm' call, warning other Miners' that there was possible danger

Crow – large black bird will shrill call, flew overhead

More interesting Gio facts:

Gio explained that insects aren't good at seeing the colour red, however birds are. This Pincushion Hakea flower uses the colour red to attract native birds to collect the pollen at the centre of the flower, and then cleverly coats the feathers of the bird with pollen from the cream stamens that surround the flower. As the bird collects pollen from flower to flower it unwittingly helps to pollinate the flowers. Isn't nature clever?

As the students discovered, rocks can create a microclimate (ie. A small area that is different from the environment around it) which can provide all manner of insects a damp, dark and cool area to hide during the day and come out at night. As they break down the soil and add lots of good microorganisms back into the soil it can be a good idea to use “Rock Mulch” around fruit trees to help improve the soil (along with good coverage of leaf litter).

Did you know more insects come out at night than during the day. If this is how many insects we saw just imagine how many we’d find at night!!

We were all amazed at the complex and diverse range of fauna and flora within the school and have a new respect for our school grounds, in particular the native plants. We learnt about the importance of encouraging native species into the grounds to provide habitat for native fauna. What was once perhaps considered a “messy garden” can now be seen by the kids as an interesting, complex and diverse home for a whole range of creatures.

Gio was an absolute wealth of information on both the fauna and flora of the area. At only 19 years old he was an inspiration to everyone. Thank you Gio!! We hope to see you again soon.