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Department of  
Sustainability and  
Environment

## Overseas students help threatened species

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They'll stay in shearing sheds, trap small mammals, do weeding and find out what a skink is ... Sounds like fun? It definitely is for 70 students from the International Student Volunteers program who are here to help with our threatened species.

Biodiversity staff are hosting student volunteers from North America and Britain who will be contributing to a range of projects that protect threatened plants and animals.

This year, six groups of student volunteers will work on two-week environmental projects across the south west, from the south coast across the volcanic plains to Nhill in the north.

Around 70 students in the International Student Volunteers (ISV) program will be spending their holidays in western Victoria working to protect threatened species.

DSE Senior Biodiversity Officer Garry Peterson, one of several staff overseeing volunteers, said ISV encourages young tertiary students to contribute to overseas environmental projects and, at the same time, helps them learn more about the environment and have fun.

"The students are volunteering in their summer break. An ISV supervisor is with them at all times and they stay in a variety of accommodation from shearing sheds to hostels," he said.

The overseas volunteers will work in small groups alongside DSE staff and regular volunteers from Coastcare, Landcare, Field Naturalists and Friends groups, Deakin University, Warrnambool College, and Koroit, St Patricks Port Fairy and Port Fairy Consolidated Primary Schools will work alongside the International Students in the coastal projects.

Several other project partners will be leading groups for many of the conservation tasks, including Greening Australia, Parks Victoria, Little Desert Nature Lodge, Moyne Shire and Lismore Landcare.

Garry said the volunteer groups make a major contribution and are invaluable to DSE's threatened species projects.

"The students' on-ground assistance forms a major component of our conservation works each year and in turn we give them the opportunity to learn about the



Clearing woody weeds to improve endangered spider orchid habitat



Monitoring the short-tailed Shearwater habitat on Griffiths Island



Corangamite Water Skink - Peter Robinson Wildlife Profiles

Australian culture and our environment," he said.

Working with schools and community groups in the area, the volunteer students are contributing to a range of works for threatened species, for example:

- Trapping small mammals in the stony woodlands
- weed removal and habitat planting on the Western District Ramsar Lakes,
- surveying spiny Rice-flowers
- habitat planting for the Corangamite Water Skink.

Garry said over the years, DSE coordinators have put a substantial effort into planning the overall volunteer project.

"Apart from identifying suitable on-ground tasks, coordinators have to consider health, safety and homesickness issues, contingency plans for bad weather and how to bring students and local communities together," he said.

"By making the most of this wonderful resource, DSE is indicating how seriously it views biodiversity protection.

"Not only will ISV groups undertake important work, help raise public awareness and create new advocates for local biodiversity support, they will also reward communities and volunteers by providing much-needed assistance for the work they undertake."

Biodiversity Officer Rachel Sims said the first and second of three volunteer groups to be based in the far south west had already made a major contribution.

"The students are invaluable to our projects," she said.

"Their on-ground assistance forms a major component of our conservation works each year and in turn they learn about the Australian culture and our environment."

Rachel's group will be involved in several projects including:

- surveying Griffiths Island, Port Fairy for Shearwater burrows
- removing weeds that are crowding out threatened orchids
- surveying for threatened plants
- habitat planting for the Orange-bellied Parrot.

Threatened Flora Project Officer Pauline Rudolph said groups based in the Wimmera would contribute to a range of works for threatened flora in the area, including:



International student volunteers tackling a wetland planting project



Habitat works

- re-introducing 300 seedlings of the federally vulnerable Large-fruited Groundsel to the Illawarra Nature Conservation Reserve
- undertaking weed and rabbit control in Kiata FFR to protect the habitat of the Metallic Sun-orchid
- fencing Golden Sun Moth habitat
- potting up threatened orchids grown in DSE's orchid conservation facility.

DSE has worked closely with the International Student Volunteers program since 2005 and has welcomed more than 500 volunteers.

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