

## Common Dolphins - can you tell the difference? \*



We are beginning to think that Port Phillip's resident 20-30 common dolphins could be as unique as our bottlenose dolphins, which were recently named a new species.

The common dolphin, *Delphinus delphis*, can be differentiated from the bottlenose dolphin by its **distinctive colouration. Look out for the creamy/white slash of colour on** its lower flanks. Also, they are much smaller and more petite than bottlenose dolphins.

It is unusual for common dolphins to form inshore populations, especially in a shallow bay as heavily

developed as Port Phillip. They usually live in deeper, offshore waters; pods can exceed 1000 dolphins. Yet **our family of common dolphins seem to spend** most of their time along a narrow stretch of eastern Port Phillip.

Two common dolphins were first recorded off Blairgowrie in 1995; by 2006, DRI had identified at least 11 resident common dolphins through fin identification photographic surveys. What is not known is how this small population is coping with living in such a busy bay.

DRI's Research Director, Sue Mason (pictured), is studying

this in her PhD. (She is enrolled at Curtin University, WA).



Her aim is to determine the impacts of humans on the resident common dolphins in Port Phillip. She will be using land and boat-based surveys, and acoustic monitoring of the dolphins.

The outcomes of Sue's study will be **critical to protecting the future of these very special common dolphins**, along with all dolphins in Port Phillip, Western Port and the Gippsland Lakes.

Our Summer Appeal letter explains more how **you** can help us to understand and safeguard our wonderful dolphins.

**\* it's the white flash!**

## Community Dolphin Watch

Please help us by reporting your dolphin sightings, noting date, time, location and number. Report on our website or call the office. We can never have too much information !



DRI has our own Facebook fan page!

Get the latest news on DRI and issues.

[www.facebook.com/driface](http://www.facebook.com/driface)



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## Special Offer

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[www.dolphinresearch.org.au](http://www.dolphinresearch.org.au)  
Thank you Moonraker

## Respect Our Dolphins this Summer



Don't deliberately approach dolphins closer than 100m (jetskis 300m). Severe penalties apply for breaching regulations.

Report cases of harassment to DSE on 136 186. Or call DRI and we can help you report cases.

## 2012 'i sea, i care' Challenge

This will be our fourth year of the 'i sea, i care' Challenge, and will run from **the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January**. Again our Education team will be **travelling around Port Phillip and Western Port**, stopping at beaches to run **free** marine education activities.

**Come along and meet us !**



Our website will have the locations and times -  
[www.dolphinresearch.org.au](http://www.dolphinresearch.org.au)

## Letter from the Chair *By Denise Orchard*

As we approach the end of 2011, on behalf of the board I would like to thank the wonderful DRI team for their efforts and also all our supporters, for without you nothing would be possible.

As you will read in this newsletter, DRI continues to be very active on many fronts and the board and staff are looking forward to yet another productive and exciting year in 2012.

I want to mention that Natalie Frazer has retired from our board after 4 years as a director. Natalie is a Marketing Leader with Ernst and Young and has brought energy and her professional acumen to the board, in addition to hosting several meetings. Our thanks go to Natalie for her contributions and we wish her the best. We are in discussion with a number of prospective new members.

On a related note, although I will remain on the board, I have decided to hand over my role as chair to Ian Stevenson, who has been a director since 2010 (pictured here at the Walk for Western Port).



Ian is very committed to DRI and comes to the role with a wealth of environmental experience, being the first Environment Manager employed in local government in Victoria and having worked at Mornington Peninsula Shire, City of Casey and City of Cardinia. I am confident that Ian will work closely with our team with enthusiasm and insights to help improve DRI.

I hope that you have a wonderful and safe summer. Perhaps we will see you on the beach with our educators as part of the 'i sea, i care' Challenge?

## Walk for Western Port

Will be on again in 2012. Join us in September for a special day celebrating the, often unrecognised, wonders of Western Port.



We are delighted that Melbourne Water, Healthy Waterways Waterwatch, has renewed their partnership with 'i sea, i care' for next year.

Waterwatch tells the story of the catchment and the issues for creeks, drains and rivers, and DRI contributes the story of what lives at the end of the drains and what is at stake if we don't live better in the catchment.

We look forward to working with their team and will keep you informed.

**healthy Waterways**  
**Waterwatch Program**

## DRI Snapshot

We believe that the photo below captures what DRI is all about. It shows two of our 'i sea, i care' Ambassadors from Lysterfield Primary school at a recent workshop discovering the **essence of marine science**; the fun, the excitement and the realisation of its relevance in their world.

These girls, Kylie and Hanne, just two of the more than 1300 Ambassadors that DRI has taught over the past ten years, now have an understanding that **Victoria's living marine treasures are indeed "too precious to lose"**.



## Thanks to our Supporters

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## Welcome to our new Members!

Abby and Sarah Ang  
Aleesha Chapman  
Shaelee Culton  
June Dale  
Ben Dyson  
(Anna) Fletcher  
Mili Haber  
Madison Hansen  
Zoe Kerkvliet  
Owen Leong  
Christopher, Corey and  
Rebecca Luxford  
Amaedo, Carlos, Elizabeth and  
Na'Kala Marquez-Perez

Tracey Mutch  
Nuria and Paco Perez-Vicente  
Caitlin Rooke  
Jennifer Schuster  
Amanda Scott  
Valda Scrase  
Reyah and Kai Stirrup  
Kerryn Valentine  
Kira Vincent  
Marianne Webb  
Trent Williams

## Research News



Sue Mason  
Research  
Officer

2011 has been a positive year for research. We have been able to maintain field surveys on our common and bottlenose dolphins in Port Phillip and managed to spend some time in the Gippsland Lakes.

A highlight of the year was finding that Ariel, who is one of our very successful Port Phillip females has again become a mother, after also becoming a grandmother last year!

Surveys from Port Phillip in April resulted in over 3,000 photo-ID images to analyse, which is still being completed.

**“Finbase” is a new database** that we have implemented to hold all our research data, including Fin-ID images that link individual sightings to locations. It will enable us to test for patterns of individual movements and associations. Customising the database for our needs and importing our past data has been a huge job and one that will be on-going.

An outcome of the work on Finbase will be the addition of DRI's long-term data into the federal government's National Marine Mammal Database.

An important outcome for the year is the new relationships we now have with Curtin University in Western Australia and Flinders University in South Australia as the result of my PhD work. There are some very established marine mammal scientists in these universities who are willing to help with our research programs.

My PhD project is taking shape on the common dolphins in eastern Port Phillip and I will update you on this in the next newsletter.

## Strandings at Koonya beach, Sorrento

DRI was notified by officers from DSE and Parks Victoria of a stranded whale and a small dolphin at Koonya Beach on November 4<sup>th</sup>.

DRI attended the strandings and recorded morphometrics and took blubber and skin samples.

The 9.5m sub-adult humpback whale had been significantly scavenged, presumably by large



sharks, particularly in the posterior region, where the spine was exposed. The tail fluke was in poor condition and of no use for ID purposes. The baleen plates, eyes and dorsal fins were absent. We estimated that it had died a few days before stranding. Being positioned on its ventral surface and with the extent of scavenging,

it was impossible to tell the animals sex.



Parks Victoria also found a small common dolphin in the same location as the whale. The animal was 1.03m long, male and had been scavenged significantly in the thoracic region and generally over the body.

The animal's umbilicus was still withering and no teeth had erupted. Along with the size, this indicates that the animal was a neonate. It possibly died at birth or perhaps lost its mother. Whilst it was tiny, it was not emaciated, so perhaps it is the former rather than the latter.

This stranding came days after another young common dolphin stranded at Portsea.

Whilst it is usually sad and unpleasant, attending strandings is crucial to collect data that in the long term will help us to understand why animals strand, and also what is 'normal'.



In these cases we found nothing obvious. In the case of the newborn baby dolphin, it is possible that it is a reminder that being born is a very risky time for mammals.

The stranded whale coincided with another 5 along Victoria's coast. These are animals under huge stress after fasting for 6 months before returning to the Antarctic summer to feed. Perhaps it is inevitable that we will see more that don't make it, as the total population recovers?

## Northern Pacific Seastars - “underwater rabbits”

Divers in Western Port are being asked to be on the alert for the **highly-invasive** Northern Pacific seastar, which was found recently near San Remo, Phillip Island.

DSE believes that the seastars belonged to an isolated population; all the seastars have been removed.



Photo courtesy CSIRO

It is estimated that after they were first detected in Port Phillip in the 1990's, their population had reached 12 million within 2 years. It is now established there, and in Tasmania's Derwent River estuary and east coast. But nowhere else in Australia, yet.

They are a **high priority pest species** because of the devastation they cause to native marine environments and marine industries such as shellfish farming.

They are voracious and opportunistic predators on almost anything they can capture, even digging up buried prey. Their diet includes sea urchins, crabs, barnacles, sea squirts and gastropods, as well as bivalves such as mussels, scallops and clams.

They can live for up to **five years and produce up to 20 million eggs each**; with the larvae free-swimming for up to 90 days - which allows mass dispersal (the currents at Port Phillip's Heads, however, limit their spread outside the bay). They can regenerate from a single limb or cut portion, as long as a part of the central disc is present and viable.

It was a group of divers who first found the Northern Pacific seastars near San Remo, and it was their **prompt action in reporting it to DSE** that led to the eradication of this population. However, we all need to continue to be vigilant, and report any sightings (not in Port Phillip) to **DSE on 136 186**.

Northern Pacific seastars are **large** (up to 30 - 40 cms) and have **5 arms**. The tips are distinctive. The arms taper into **pointed, upturned tips**.

Their colour on the underside is a uniform yellow. On the top and sides of the arms, the colour ranges from **pale yellow with purple tips, to a mottled yellow/purple**.

DSE advises us **“to rinse and dry all diving and fishing gear in fresh water** to kill any Northern Pacific seastar larvae **before entering a different marine environment** (e.g. Western Port or other beach or dive areas outside Port Phillip). Also, **do not carry Port Phillip water to any other area (e.g. in your boat, motor, fishing or diving gear).**”



The native Ocellate seastar - (*Necteria ocellata*) (above) has **rounded arm tips**, and is usually orange or yellow. It does not have the obvious narrow, very pointed, upturned tips of the Northern Pacific seastar. (Photo DRI)

## Education News



**Mandy Robertson**  
Education Director

2011 is drawing to a close and it's been an incredible year.

### Highlights were

"Totally Wild" filmed the dolphin swim workshop on Sea All, which was screened nationally on Channel 10 in May and the Ambassadors from Aireys Inlet presented at the National Coastal Conference in Torquay.

In April, '*i sea, i care*' was a finalist in the Victorian Coastal Council Awards.

The Ambassadors from Emerald Primary School were presented with their school's World Environment Day Award for the positive impact they have on their school community.

In July they presented at the Emerald Sustainability Group meeting, and 7 Ambassadors were heard on 3RRR's Radio Marina.

And in November we had the last workshop, this one at Warringine Park. A chance to give something back and to say goodbye to our team of Environmental Champions for 2011 (see article opposite).

On a personal note, it's been an amazing year too. I took over from Ben Camm at the end of January, hit the ground running in February and somehow managed to come out the other side. I've learned a lot and made some good friends.

I want to say a huge thank you to everyone at DRI for helping me settle in to the job (Sandra, you are sorely missed) and especially the Education team, Janet, Karri and Don for all your hard work, advice and support!

Ben will be taking another year of leave in 2012, so I am looking forward to working with you all again over the next 12 months.

Have a great Christmas and New Year,

Cheers Mandy

## Warringine Workshop



Despite the wind and the rain, we had a great turn out for the last workshop of the year. Weed Removal, Animal Tracks and Scats and Life through a Lens was the order of the day. Awards were given, there were goodbyes to this year's Ambassadors, hellos to new ones and the day was rounded off with a good old-fashioned Aussie barbie in the rain!! Huge Thanks to Gerard and Josh ( oh, Mya and Curtis too) for making the day a success.



Jake from Andersons Creek Primary School hard at work

## Ambassador Awards

This is the chance to celebrate the achievements of our Ambassadors throughout the year and give special recognition to those who have done special work in protecting our marine treasures.



### Ambassador Co-ordinator of the Year

Debbie Cooper from Emerald Primary School has been an outstanding '*i sea, i care*' co-ordinator for six years. Co-ordinators are the vital link between DRI and the Ambassadors and it's wonderful to reward someone so dedicated. Well done Deb!



(Photographed above with the Ambassadors from Emerald Primary School; Cailey, Jessica, and Flynn - Josh couldn't make it)

### Ambassador of the Year

This award goes to Stephen Day of Tyabb Primary School. He has demonstrated a real passion for the protection of the marine environment and a maturity beyond his years. Good job, Stephen, keep up the great work!



### Ambassador School of the Year

This was a hard one to judge as we had two entries we just couldn't decide between. Both have contributed so positively to their school communities that we had to award them Joint Winners. Congratulations to Emerald Primary School and Kunyung Primary School.



Brianna, Maddy, Jack and Cameron from Kunyung Primary School with their Award

Melbourne Water is a major partner of '*i sea, i care*' through:  
**healthy Waterways**  
**Waterwatch Program**  
[www.waterwatchmelbourne.org.au](http://www.waterwatchmelbourne.org.au)

## Ambassadors in Action in 2011



**For our Ambassadors, go to the blue devil fish!**

*'i sea, i care'* Entry Caring for OUR Marine Treasures



[www.dolphinresearch.org.au](http://www.dolphinresearch.org.au)