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DOLPHIN
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE



Newsletter

Term one 2026

*Proudly brought to you by
your Melbourne 'i sea, i care'
Ambassadors.*

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MOONRAKER WORKSHOP

Ambassadors had a fabulous time during their workshops on Moonraker Dolphin Swims in Port Phillip Bay where Ambassadors, including many first time snorkelers, took to the challenge and entered the water to swim with the Australian Fur seals at Popes Eye Marine Park with great enthusiasm!

Ambassadors squealed with delight watching the seals swimming around them, and they loved spotting the Weedy seadragons at Portsea Pier. Some Ambassadors were swam with our beautiful Bottlenose dolphins, and there were big smiles all around as dolphins swam under and around the boat!

What an amazing opportunity for Ambassadors to get up close to these wonderful animals and gain a deeper understanding of our precious marine environment, and the actions they can take to help our coastal creatures. Many mentioned they were even more inspired to act for the oceans and they had some great ideas for actions they could take!

Thank you to the Moonraker crew, and the ISIC teachers, parents and carers for transporting Ambassadors and supporting their conservation journey! We are truly grateful to you all!



RESEARCH NEWS

The Research team are proud to share the 3rd edition of the Killer Whales of Australia - Eastern Catalogue, the only publically available identification catalogue for killer whales across Eastern Australia! This research has been made possible by the generous donation of digital and film imagery by researchers and citizen scientists to Killer Whales Australia across nearly three decades.

We have reviewed thousands of image and video submissions dating back to 1986. This comprehensive review of our database has improved our knowledge and understanding of the killer whales identified in eastern Australia, and the yet to be formally described killer whales observed in Australian waters.



This research relies solely on donations from our incredible community. Please consider supporting the research through our Adoption Program, where you can adopt killer whale 'Split Fin', or by making a charitable donation. View the catalogue or adopt Split Fin on the DRI website!

AMBASSADOR HIGHLIGHTS

It was wonderful to catch up with so many Ambassadors who attended several of our regular school holiday programs! During our 'Be a Dolphin Researcher for a Day' program, participants learned all about our local dolphins, then became young marine scientists themselves and identified individual dolphins through their dorsal fins!



The second half of the session focused on the whales that visit our coast during winter! We listened to some amazing dolphin and whale sounds, played an activity about echolocation and finished off with a great discussion about the many ways we can help care for their environment!



Ambassadors also attended our Rockpool Ramble at Balnarring beach! Everyone had a fantastic time searching for snails, flatworms, crabs, seastars, squids and much more!! Participants learned about the constant struggles of our intertidal critters to survive in this harsh rocky environment, how we as humans can impact their survival, and the many actions we can all take to help protect our beautiful coastal environments and their inhabitants!



COMING UP: SCHOOL HOLIDAY FUN

Discover Dandenong Creek Festival 2026

Thursday 16th April 2026, from 11-2pm, Tirhatuan Park, Dandenong North. Stop in and say hi to our educators at our DRI stall and learn about all things whales and dolphins at this free festival! There are also many other amazing organisations presenting on how they are helping our precious environment, plenty of food and fun activities! We look forward to seeing you there!



The grit of the gastropod

Life in Port Phillip's intertidal zone is not an easy one, not many can survive half their life underwater and half out in the strong wind and harsh sun. But if you look a little closer, you may spot the small warriors that not only survive this battle of the tides but thrive.

Every twelve hours the tide ripples back in, submerging the sunbaked and wind struck gastropods, like sea snails who have been patiently waiting – each with their own unique way to live life on the edge.

Some snails, like the zebra top shell, use a special trap door, or 'operculum', to keep themselves from drying out in the heat. By sealing their perfectly molded door shut, water is trapped inside their shell to keep them from desiccating. This also comes in handy to stop any curious beaks looking for a soft, salty snack.

With the hot sun, hungry birds, strong waves, and gusty wind to watch out for, temperature and evaporation are just a fraction of the many threats these snails must overcome.

When the high tide retreats from the upper rocky shore, many gastropods will find a protected area out of the elements and fight for the best position. The little blue periwinkle however, has a different strategy. They will expose themselves to the harsh elements at the very top of the rocky shore for the longest period of time to avoid this fierce competition for space.

But fighting for a good position isn't the only competition these snails must overcome – algae and lichen is a popular choice on the menu for many herbivorous gastropods when the tide comes in.

Yet, it is the carnivorous snails like the cart-rut shell that are the ones to watch out for. With a tongue like a drill, these meat eating predators will be on the hunt for any unsuspecting bivalve victims. Once they find their prey, they drill their tongue or 'radula' through the tough outer shell and trickle in their venom, turning the soft bodied snail into a liquid milkshake. If you ever see shells with a perfectly drilled hole along the beach, you now know the battle story behind it.

If you thought the drilling tongue was impressive, wait until you hear about the gastropod with a harpoon. Introducing the remarkable cone snail, a vicious hunter that uses venom to paralyse and kill their prey. After tasting the chemical signature of a worm or fish, the cone snail will extend its proboscis to twice the length of its shell, and within one-tenth of a second of touching its prey, the harpoon is fired – leaving little chance of escape.

The rocky shores of Port Phillip are home to a marvel of stealthy hunters and tough warriors. So next time you visit any rocky shore, take a moment to look beyond the rocks, crabs, and seaweed and appreciate the grit of the gastropod.



To read the rest of our **Discover Port Phillip: Water & Wildlife stories** scan the QR code above.

