CORINNA’S CATERPILLARS

By Joanne Ticehurst

Corinna School is situated in the suburb of Waitangirua in Porirua. The school has a stable roll of 220 children from new entrants to year 8s. Almost half the children are identified as Samoan, followed by Maori, Cook Island Maori, Tokelauan and other ethnicities that include Filipino, Tongan, Tuvaluan, Pakeha and Southeast Asian; including Kampuchea/Cambodian, Laotian and Myanmar.

The children are culturally diverse with many of their parents from more than one ethnic group.

Some children are being raised by their grandparents; and some from homes where English is a second language.

At the end of 2011 the school became part of the Enviroschools community and in 2015 they received their Silver award. The Enviroschools vision for Corinna is that the school will be a place where the students feel strong, nurtured and safe; their diversity is expressed in many different ways; environmental programmes are school-wide, creating a clean waste-free place; the trees and gardens are cared for and they provide learning and nourishment for their community.

Joanne Ticehurst is a Y3 classroom teacher at Corinna School and the Enviroschools Facilitator.

“For the last three years my class has developed and maintained our butterfly garden,” she said. “Here’s a piece of collaborative writing about our butterfly journey this year, from four of my children, Marino, Ierei, Zaylin and Upoko.”

Room six have been a kaitiaki of the caterpillars at Corinna School so they can turn into butterflies.

In our garden we have swan plants and marigolds. The swan plants are for the caterpillars to eat and the marigolds attract the butterflies to our garden.

When the caterpillars get big we bring them inside to our butterfly tank and watch them go into a chrysalis. Then we wait for them to hatch out into a beautiful butterfly.

When the butterfly hatches, it hangs upside down to let the blood go through its veins and to dry out its wings before it can fly.

We know which is a boy or a girl because boys have a black dot on the bottom of each wing.

Some people in our class have taken the butterflies outside and released them. Most times the butterflies flew away but some of us had to take our butterfly down to the garden and put it on a swan plant.

We have tagged many butterflies this year. We know butterflies in America fly to Mexico in winter. But where do our New Zealand butterflies go? The tags might help us find out.

Soon we will need to start planting our swan plant seeds ready for the next season. We might even have a competition and see who can grow the tallest swan plant.

Last year, my class had to come up with a solution to protect our swan plants from a major predator - the weed eater! Our caretaker at the time thought the plants were weeds until he noticed he was actually in the butterfly garden, by then we had lost a few plants. At the time we were collecting bottles for another project and the children thought we could use them around the garden. This lasted until the holidays when vandals kicked the bottles all around the garden. One of our teacher aides and a couple of children built a wooden barrier around the garden to protect the plants.

During morning tea and lunchtimes, you can see the children from different year levels looking at the caterpillars, counting them and talking. They talk about what they see, what they’re thinking and what they’re wondering.
By Tim Kelly

In the first week of March, Hurunui College hosted its very own ‘Lepidoptera Week’. This was a follow on from our very successful ‘Spider Week’ in 2016. To call it a week is a bit of a misnomer as planning started in spring 2016 and the activities pushed on through to the end of March.

The start of March marked the beginning of the monarch butterfly tagging season. The previous spring the primary school students and their teachers planted swan plant seeds and raised some seedlings. Although this was less successful than hoped, some obliging grown-ups stepped in with adult swan plants for the classrooms in the new school year.

The students had been keenly following the progress of the caterpillars and by the time March came around they had witnessed the transformation from eggs right through to butterflies. The students were determined to see each butterfly emerge, but the tricky butterflies tended to sneak out when nobody was looking!

It took a little while for the teachers to build up the confidence, but after a couple of goes they were well into the monarch tagging. We also gave tags to families who were rearing monarchs at home. Then one day in late March a student came to school reporting that a tagged butterfly had been found at her grandfather’s house 8km away. Sure enough, it was one of the butterflies we had tagged and this caused great excitement among the students.

The butterflies inspired a number of activities in school that week, from art projects, to creative writing, to science learning, and more. The highlights for the students were monarch tagging, watching monarchs emerge, and moth trapping.

Moth trapping occurred courtesy of one of our school’s graduates, James Tweed of Otago University. James is studying the use of moths as indicators of ecosystem health and also works for the citizen science programme, MothNet. As part of the MothNet programme James was able to bring moth traps to our community and together with some of the keener students we set the traps out in three local areas for two nights: a modified landscape, a native landscape, and a regenerating native landscape. We collected a lot of different moths and are very much looking forward to seeing the results of this experiment.

James also had time to give talks to all the students about moths in general, and showed the kids how to mount moths and butterflies using household resources. In the period following, the students were encouraged to photograph lepidoptera they found at home and post their photos on www.naturewatch.org.nz for identification. Naturewatch is used a lot in our school for species identification and is a really great tool for getting interaction with scientists.

Lepidoptera Week was for us more than just an opportunity to learn about moths and butterflies; it was an opportunity to take part in some genuine science and get hands-on with lepidoptera ecology. It has been a highlight of the year to date and has likely developed a new bunch of butterfly enthusiasts to support the Monarch Butterfly Trust.

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