



Bethany - Saving pygmy bluetongues

What is your school like?

My school is in the mid north of South Australia and we've got about 200 students and we're kind of rural. We don't have any big towns near us, the closest town would probably be Port Pirie but we're kind of a small school for where we are.

We're an agriculture school, so we've got agricultural sciences as a subject and we've also got agriculture as part of the school so we've got our own school farm that has a couple of hundred sheep on it.

What was your goal and what did you achieve?

I was hoping to achieve more awareness of the pygmy bluetongue lizard. Not many people would know about it. I know that lots of NRM people know about it but especially around my area there's lots of people that know that they're there but don't know much information about them and they're very important little lizards and they're very cute. They can grow up to 20cm and the babies are about 5cm so they are very small compared to bluetongues and shingleback lizards.

They're an endangered species so I just want people to know more about them and if they see them, what to do with them or where to go for information about them and just to know more information about them. If you live on the north side of Adelaide in the open areas you can help by planting or trying to plant iron grass which is a native grass that the little lizards love. If you have lots of spiders that dig holes around your yard then don't bury them or hide them under pots or something, leave them about, because there's more than a chance of having a lizard in there, whether it be a pygmy bluetongue or other small skinks or other little animals. I've been talking to people and giving them information so that's how I'm going to make sure that people at least know something about them.

How did you communicate with others about your project?

I've been talking to people via email and going out into the community and talking to real life people face-to-face and showing pictures and talking to the Pygmy Bluetongue Conservation Association and people around my school, teachers, local farmers and other people around my town.

Have you had any challenges?

A problem that I've had is that many people that I talk to are around my age, or little bit younger or a little bit older and they're not as conservation minded as I am. So it's been hard to talk to them and get them to understand how endangered they are and how we can help them, but lots of older people and teachers and people that actually care about the environment have been very understanding of the information that I've talked to them about.

There are lots of people that are like me, who like small insects and arachnids and lizards and reptiles, any sort of small animal, and that's a way I've been getting people to listen to what I'm trying to say. Because they're so tiny and the people have felt like they needed to help them because they're small and they can't do many things by themselves, so us as humans can help them get along with life by protecting them and not hurting them or moving them away.

Have you gained any new skills?

I've definitely gained confidence in talking to people, I was very shy at the start when I started last year, now I've definitely gained confidence in talking to people, especially strangers and younger people, parents, teachers, NRM staff, any sort of person, and through the project I've definitely gained more knowledge on the little lizards and how I could help with animals like them. I've learnt how to go around talking to people, getting information off of experts, on how to save or how to contribute to saving little animals or big animals.

What did you enjoy most?

I've enjoyed everything because I'm very passionate about the little lizards. I definitely enjoyed reading about all of the information. I knew a lot about them previous to doing this project but I've still learnt lots of new things from them and I've definitely loved reading through the little 'Pinky and Peet' book which is such a cute little book written by one of the Pygmy Bluetongue Conservation Association members, such a gorgeous little book with gorgeous little illustrations so that's been quite fun. In the YEC, I just love hanging around with people who are passionate about the same sorts of things that I am, and people that enjoy the environment and helping the animals and the environment and conservation and water resources.

Next steps?

Next year I'm studying year 12 so I'm hoping to do something in my own time about the little lizards, travelling around places with some of the Pygmy Bluetongue specialists and some doctors and some higher up people and just getting more awareness out. Hopefully people on a broader scale in South Australia and Australia will know about them more.

Your advice to other students?

I would say, do some research before you think of an idea, then come to YEC and know that you have some broad understanding on that subject and then after you go back home and have researched some more, then you'll have an excellent project.

This case study was transcribed from an interview. These are Bethany's words and opinions.

