

Green thinning adventures on beautiful Namcott



Chelsea Cox, Bailey Caughey, Devlin-James Clarke, Blake Cox,
Jesse Lewis, Christopher McGuirk, Roree Moorhouse and Lucy Shea

Hay Public School



Sharing stories about
the world around us

Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between our funding partners and school students by providing opportunities for positive, cooperative activities that encourage students to learn about and respond to, natural resource management and the importance of agricultural production.

wirraminna.org.au/petaurus/creative-catchment-kids/

Petaurus Education Group

Petaurus Education Group identifies, develops and delivers a range of learning and curriculum experiences, resources and initiatives for schools and community groups to connect with land, water, productive farming, sustainability and cultural issues at the local level. The group was established by Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre in late-2014 to support its operations and education activities.

wirraminna.org.au/petaurus

Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area.

envirostories.com.au

Greenthinning adventures on beautiful Namcott

Authors: Chelsea Cox, Bailey Caughey, Devlin-James Clarke, Blake Cox, Jesse Lewis, Christopher McGuirk, Roree Moorhouse and Lucy Shea

School: Hay Public School

Acknowledgements: Mr. McClelland's art group drawings, Mackenzie Dawson and Jessica McGuirk

We would like to thank our local, internationally acclaimed artist Mr. Chris McClelland for helping with artwork.

In 2018, students from Hay Public School were involved in the Creative Catchment Kids program. The program was generously funded by Murrumbidgee Landcare Incorporated.

Creative Catchment Kids is partnered with Enviro-Stories, a Peekdesigns education program.



David Cox is a hard working farmer from Hay. David and his wife Janine, together with David's parents (Allen and Helen Cox), own four farms around Hay. These farms produce corn, cotton, wheat, wine grapes, cattle and sheep. David's wife Janine also owns and operates a beauty therapist business.

They have four daughters. Sophie, who is at university completing a business and management degree, Laura who is in year 12 at Hay War Memorial High School, Kate who is at boarding school at St. Francis in Leeton and Chelsea, who is in year 6 at Hay Public School.

The Cox family live in Lang Street, Hay, and David drives out to his farms each day.





Namcott is located about 30 kilometres west of Hay along the Murrumbidgee River. Namcott is a beautiful property that has been owned by the Cox family since 1988. With its river frontage, Namcott has beautiful bends of river red gum and box trees. David and his father Allen Cox (pictured above) are passionate about agriculture and working with their environment. In recent years the Cox family have contracted timber worker Alan Currie to ‘greenthin’ the trees on Namcott’s river bends.



Alan Currie is a professional timber cutter who has been working out in the bush since he was around 14 years old. He first started working for his dad in 1994. Alan was contracted by the Cox family to green thin the river bends on Namcott in an effort to improve the natural environment to help the trees regrow naturally as well as support a commercial firewood business and improve the land for agricultural grazing. Careful and responsible green thinning is a win-win for the environment and the economy.



Alan has had a long career in timber cutting. He jokes that he has walked the river, cutting timber from Mildura to Hay. We believe this would be true! In order to become a timber cutter, Alan has many tickets to show he is able to fell trees correctly and safely and to show he is aware of regulations in the environment protecting trees. He also needs his work safety tickets. Alan also needs a variety of licenses to operate and drive his equipment and different vehicles. Some of the equipment he uses are a circular saw, a loader, trucks, air compressor, four wheeler motorbike and of course chainsaws. He has to replace chainsaws every two years as they just wear out from all the work. All these pieces of equipment are important for him to have a successful day on the job.



Alan has worked for so long that he has learnt much about trees. He thinks the easiest tree to cut is pine, while the hardest to cut are river red gum and box. It is easier to cut in winter as there is more moisture in the trees which makes them more supple.

He usually works by himself, except when he is felling the trees. Then he always has a spotter as it is so dangerous. He says it is the third most dangerous job in the world.

He has been through some amazing experiences in his time as a timber cutter including being bitten by red-back spiders, being chased by mother brown snakes and watching two bee hives high in the trees have a war between one another. One time, a stick flew off a tree he was felling, punctured his cheek and caused him to lose most of his teeth on the right side of his mouth. He has also been caught in huge clumps of boxthorn while trying to cut trees. The boxthorn punctured many holes in his arms and body.

Although there have been many tough incidents, Alan loves his job very much. His job is not a common job, so he gets to work all over the Riverina, and beyond, in beautiful outback country. Every day brings different experiences and adventures.



Green thinning is a type of logging where trees with a girth of less than 1.25cm can be removed so that the other trees around them don't have to fight for light and can grow larger, straighter and become healthier. It is great for the environment because unhealthy trees that suppress other trees are removed and the healthy trees then flourish.

Green thinning is strictly controlled by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). No big trees are allowed to be cut down, this is because they are seed trees, or habitat trees. Habitat trees provide shelter for a variety of animals such as lizards, snakes and birds. They are old trees and become hollowed out by weather conditions such as wind, fire, rain and flood. The hollowed areas allow animals and insects to build homes and be safe.



The EPA also has strict guidelines about how many trees you can cut down in areas that are close to the river. One of the reasons for this is to make sure the bank is not eroded when trees are cut down. Another reason is to make sure there are enough trees around the river to protect the country from salinity. There is salt in the water table below the ground. The trees draw out the water and keep the water table below the ground. If there are no trees, the water table will rise and the salty water will come the surface. If there is salt on the ground, the soil will be ruined.

The first 20 metres of timber back from the high river mark are not allowed to be touched. In the next 20-25 metres the regulations are that three trees must be left every 30 metres. At 45 metres from the river one tree every 15 metres must be left. Alan and David make sure that they leave even more trees than are required.





In order to choose the right trees, Alan checks their width, their structure and their health. To help him with his measurements Alan stands about ten metres away from a tree and puts his thumb up and half closes his eyes. If he can't see the tree behind his thumb then he can remove the tree. If he can see it, he has to leave the tree.

The EPA are really happy with the work. They say Alan Currie, David, Janine, Allen and Helen Cox are leaving a very small footprint. There is little impact on the environment.

Namcott lies along the banks of the Murrumbidgee River in Wiradjuri country. It contains lots of Aboriginal history such as shield trees, ceremonial grounds and even a birthing tree.

Trading was very popular in Wiradjuri country because there were no rocks or stones to make such things as axes and spears. To cut a shield, canoe or coolamon out of a tree, the Aboriginals used stones or axes. You can tell whether they used an axe or stone by the marks on the tree. A stone created jagged, rough marks and an axe's mark were smoother. The Aboriginals would cut the outline of the shield, canoe or coolamon, then take hot coals from their fires and put them in the trunk behind the bark. The hot coal pushed their way down from the top of the carving, and the bark slowly came away from the tree. Finally, the shield, coolamon or canoe popped out of the tree. The sap of the tree trunk behind the bark was also sealed, protecting the tree.

Sometimes these trees could also show directions to another special place nearby or another tree. The trees could also be used as boundary marks.





The Cox family recognise the importance of caring for their river environment and are careful to protect Aboriginal sites and the river red gums and box trees. They also recognise how greenthinning looks after and creates a strong environment with healthy trees that are not suppressed or dying. In times of floods many, many saplings appear and if they are not thinned out they will die. If the river bends are left and the fallen timber is not cleared, floods will ruin the wood. If there are fires, the fallen timber and choked close trees will mean that there is a lot of fuel for a terrible fire that will destroy all the trees including habitat trees.

Greenthinning also allows Alan to run a firewood business, which allows people in all parts of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia to stay warm in their houses. It also means that he can employ people and help our economy.



Greenthinning is also great for Cox family's cattle as they can graze in the river bends where once they could not get into because the trees were so thick. Now grass can grow because the light can reach the ground.



With green thinning the trees are strong and straight and not overcrowded so the environment becomes healthier. The strict regulations mean the banks of the river are protected. Habitat trees are protected which provide shelter for birds and animals.

David, Janine, his father and mother, Allen and Helen, and their timber cutter, Alan, care for their environment because it provides them with money. Without a healthy environment they wouldn't be able to get sustainable firewood or breed healthy cattle. They all understand their land and recognize the need to ensure that the environment is cared for and healthy.





The Sounds of Namcott

Out west from Hay there is a farm called Namcott, dust, dirt, water, trees
When they cut down the massive red gums there are lots of swarming bees.

The water is shades of green that ebbs and loves to flow

Hurry up and take a picture before it loses its glow.

The dust and dirt are red and brown and there's grit in your eyes

But when it rains the grass is green and the river, it does rise.

The stomping of the cattle may give you such a fright

So you buckle up your belt and hold on really tight.

Fire and floods may cause great havoc and threaten to destroy

Buts life regrows and we will leap, cheer and jump for joy.

If you look up high, you shall see the sunset light

Oh you will be ever so blinded, for it is so bright.

The aboriginal carvings are special and deep

They mean so much to all of us, they may make you weep.

The animals and insects crawl around

They are so quiet you can't hear a sound.

Each chosen tree will fall one by one

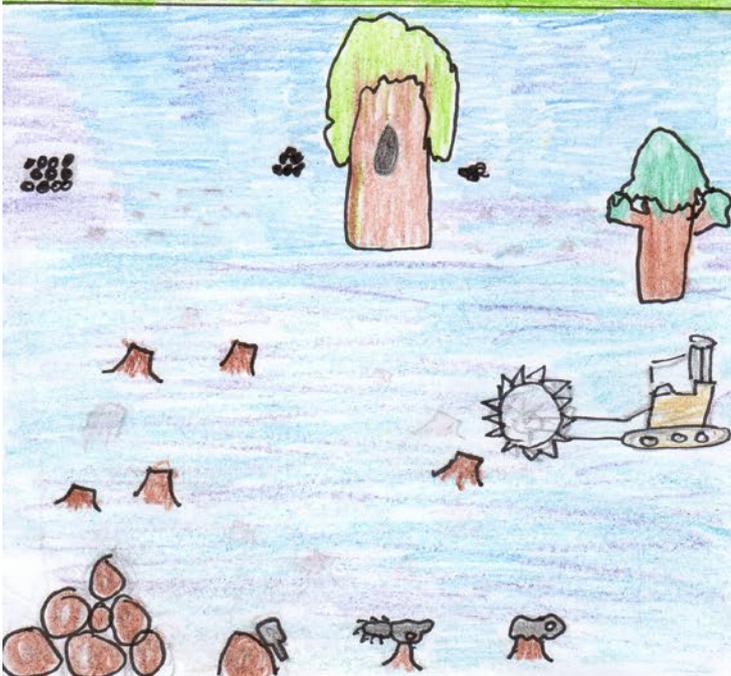
The others will grow strong and reach to the sun.

Those on Namcott care for the land

And they talk to us so we can understand.







Dear David, Janine, Mr. and Mrs. Cox and Alan

Thank you very much for letting us come out to Namcott and learn about greenthinning, timber cutting, agricultural enterprises, Aboriginal culture, environmental issues and much more. We had so much fun and enjoyed our adventures and barbeque.

We really enjoyed building our fort. We started by cleaning out the log to make rooms for our fort. Then we put some logs across the other side. After that we stripped the leaves from a dead branch and put a layer of them on another layer of sticks and logs with some more leaves to protect it from the wind and dust. We were really happy with our fort and Chelsea said it is still there.

Thanks again to you all for such an entertaining and great learning experience.





Chelsea Cox, Lucy Shea, Roree Moorhouse, Devlin-James Clarke, Bailey Caughey, Christopher McGuirk, Jesse Lewis and Blake Cox

2018 Year 6, Hay Public School



MURRUMBIDGEE
Landcare
INCORPORATED