



NATURE TRACKERS



## Engaging schools in citizen science – pathways to success

**Citizen science has been lauded as an innovative and fun way to engage young people in conservation and science. But what parts of citizen science programs are most suited to the classroom? What works for teachers and what works for students?**

In 2018, the Bookend Trust's Expedition Class launched a curriculum-aligned educational program to bring *Where? Where? Wedgie!* into the classroom. Expedition Class integrated a series of short videos, activities, and lesson plans, designed for classes from Year 1 to Year 9. In 2018, this was supported by school visits from an educator, and engagement with the educator and an eagle researcher as they travelled on a month-long expedition round Tasmania with daily video reports.

### Key benefits

A key benefit of the *Where? Where? Wedgie!* Expedition Class was the enthusiasm it generated in students. Both teachers and students described the enthusiasm for the project, and excitement it engendered about eagles, eagle conservation, and learning in general.

*"As a teacher, the way that it fuels their excitement, to engage them in measurement, maths, things like that, which is just really invaluable."*

*"Well you get to see them in real life not just on photos, and you get to go to cool places and have fun. Just do stuff you've probably never done before."*

*"Every day they would talk about it and tell me how many wedgies they saw"*



*"it just looks really fun. And fun things get stuck in my head."*

*"the engagement level just goes up 200% when you become involved ...it's like a magic pill"*

*"And then one trip, I saw a wedgie out of the blue and I just like yay!"*

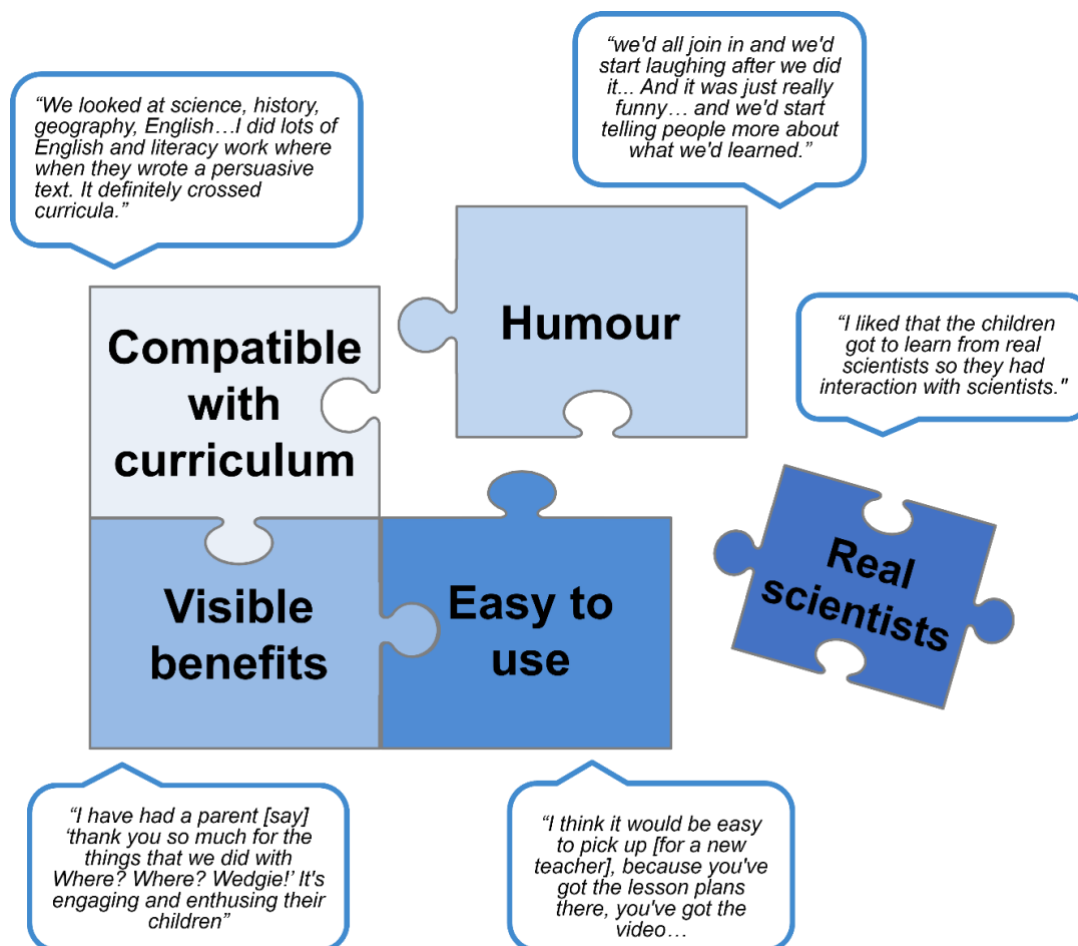
*"linking it with ongoing problems in the world and getting the kids thinking about that was really good."*



*I want to make sure everyone takes care of wedge-tailed eagles."*

## Elements that contributed to success

We identified various ingredients for successful environmental engagement in children. Teachers valued its capacity to link with a range of curriculum areas, and that the different components of the program made it easy to introduce into the classroom. Teachers also found that it catered for many different learning styles, and appreciated the visible engagement of students. Both teachers and students said they particularly appreciated the interactions with scientists, and that the program employed a strong element of humour. *These ingredients helped to encourage participation in the program and related activities.*



## Methods

In 2018, we conducted a schools-based evaluation with participating schools to explore the impacts of Expedition Class. We conducted focus group discussions with nine classes who had been involved in the program, and eight teachers. These discussions explored perceptions about the benefits of the program, and the utility of different program components.

## Recommendations

Developing school-based citizen science programs—such as *Where? Where? Wedgie!* Expedition Class—can provide a conduit not only for environmental education but support a broader range of school-based educational goals