

Keen students get muddy for science

bay
On the

Kandy Curran



IT'S not every primary teacher who allows his students to play in the mud for a few hours.

Roebuck Primary School science teacher Anthony Collopy however, likes to get his students into "hands-on science" at the marine wonderland of Roebuck Bay.

With the tide receding, small groups of supervised students were led onto the exposed mudflats of Town Beach to gain an understanding of what lives in the mud.

What the enthusiastic and well-behaved students observed, absorbed them for over an hour.

Sentinel crabs scurrying into burrows, dogwhelks chasing prey, topshells making curly tracks on the mud, soft shelled bivalves using their big foot to jump, a mangrove mudskipper doing a hop and comb stars with "feathers" on their arms for filtering prey from the water.

The muddy experience gave the students an insight into the extraordinary life in the mudflats of Roebuck Bay.

Broome Bird Observatory's Margot Dorebeek who helped with the excursion along with Kandy Curran from the Roebuck Bay Working Group, explained



Roebuck Primary students discovering the extraordinary life on Town Beach's mudflats.

Picture: Kandy Curran

how important the invertebrates are for the migratory shorebirds.

"Up to 120,000 shorebirds fly all the way from the northern hemisphere, some non-stop to get to these remarkable mudflats to gorge on the incredible diversity of invertebrate animals, like

crabs, snails, shells and worms," Ms Dorebeek said.

The students also learned sea-grass meadows off Town Beach provide food for dugongs and turtles.

They also discovered the blue green algae, lyngbya, has been

spreading in Roebuck Bay since 2005.

With lyngbya thriving in water which contains high levels of nutrients, the students learned they can take actions to stop these chemicals reaching Roebuck Bay, thereby reducing lyngbya.

If you would like to learn more about preventing lyngbya blooms spreading in Roebuck Bay, visit: www.roebuckbay.org.au/lyngbya.php.

■ **Kandy Curran is the co-ordinator of the Roebuck Bay Working Group.**