

# Families go wild for the Great Victorian Fish Count

By Caitlin Griffith, Victorian National Parks Association – [caitlin@vnpa.org.au](mailto:caitlin@vnpa.org.au)

## Great Victorian Fish Count

Every November and December, hundreds of divers and snorkelers hit the water with a dive slate to record the numbers of 35 important fish species and report any others not usually found on the Victorian coastline.

The data collected is uploaded to the Atlas of Living Australia (an online store for biodiversity data, currently with more than 67 million records) to improve our knowledge of Victoria's marine species.

In 2017, the Victorian National Parks Association endeavoured to diversify and increase participation in the Great Victorian Fish Count. One of the key audiences was families. There was a record total number of participants, with almost 700 people taking part and around 30 people joining Wild Families activities.

The Great Victorian Fish Count has been running for more than a dozen years and is led by the Victorian National Parks Association in partnership with Museums Victoria, Parks Victoria, Coastcare Victoria, Redmap, local dive operators and local community groups.



Father and daughter team with Wild Families on the Great Victorian Fish Count.

## Families on the Great Victorian Fish Count

As a first, the Great Victorian Fish Count included two 'Wild Families' activities that were run specifically to encourage greater participation from families with children.

### Outcomes for the families

For most families, snorkeling in Victoria was a new experience for all of them. As such the outcomes for children and adults were much the same. Families reported back:

- They are keen to learn more about what it means to be a marine biologist.
- It was a wonderful opportunity to try something new and learn together.
- Many had been snorkeling in other parts of the world, but not in Victoria. They are now keen to try more snorkeling closer to home and know more about where to try snorkeling and how to go about it.
- All families said they would participate together again.

### Outcomes for VNPA

As we continue our journey to be a more engaging organisation for families we learned:

- What an inspiring and bonding experience the Great Victorian Fish Count can be for families.
- We will need new systems in place to limit significant 'no show' rates.
- Families who participated are likely to return to the Great Victorian Fish Count annually.
- Providing all of the equipment and training made it possible for families to participate.
- Thirty people participated who would not have otherwise done so.

### Outcomes for science and nature

- Nine target species were recorded by families at St Leonards Pier, including 3 species of rays and 7 target species were recorded at Rye Pier, including 2 ray species.
- Families experienced what it was like to be a marine biologist.

## Engaging more families

Some questions for the Victorian National Parks Association on engaging families in the future:

- How do we create stepping stones for families keen to deepen their involvement and learning in the future?
- What opportunities can we provide to families so they can continue their learning and contribution to marine science independently?
- What examples of family friendly citizen science projects exist in terrestrial environments in Victoria?



Grandmother and grandson team loved being marine biologists for the day.

Juvenile Scalyfin.  
Photo: John Gaskell



## Wild Families

Wild Families is all about supporting families to:

01 ENJOY



02 DISCOVER



03 LEARN ABOUT NATURE



04 LOOK AFTER NATURE



We have a range of activity sheets for families with children aged up to 12 years old and run regular adventures.

Citizen science is a valuable way families can contribute to caring for nature and develop a family practice of participating in science together.



VICTORIAN  
NATIONAL PARKS  
ASSOCIATION  
*Be part of nature*

Address: Level 3, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053.  
Phone: 03 9347 5188 | Email: [vnpa@vnpa.org.au](mailto:vnpa@vnpa.org.au) | Website: [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)  
Facebook: [facebook.vnpa.org.au](https://facebook.vnpa.org.au) | Twitter: [twitter.com/vnpatweets](https://twitter.com/vnpatweets)