

Adventure out



Building CUBBIES

CREATING MEMORIES

One sunny Saturday in April a caper of kids and their families ventured to Yanchep National Park to try their hand at building cubby houses as part of Nature Play WA's second annual Cubby Town. The event – designed to encourage kids and their families to spend time in nature getting their hands and feet dirty – was a huge success.

by Rhianna King



I rarely need an excuse to venture up to Yanchep National Park. For me, it has everything you need for a great day out – bush to discover on a network of trails; beautiful grassed areas for picnics and barbecues; a riot of birdlife to spot; kangaroos and koalas to encounter up close; cultural activities to enjoy; caves to explore; Choc Drops tea rooms for coffees, drinks and sweet treats; and the Yanchep Inn for something more substantial to eat or a drink of a 'colder' nature. And, it's just 50 kilometres north of the CBD. So, when I heard Nature Play WA was hosting its second annual Cubby Town – a free community event – on Saturday 28 April, I happily deferred my usual Saturday morning chores until the afternoon so I could attend with my kids.



BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

The weather on the day couldn't have been any more perfect – a magnificent 28 degrees; not bad for the end of April. We arrived a little after the start time of 10am and already the Lakeside picnic area was heaving with activity. Kids were buzzing around collecting branches, boxes and other material off the ground to make their cubby houses. The branches they were using (often those used to feed the on-site koalas) had been collected by park rangers for six months ahead of the event. There was a surprising variety of shapes and sizes of cubby houses – some resembled a tee-pee while others took more of a box-like form. Some cubbies made use of trees as scaffolding, while others, impressively, were freestanding. One even resembled



● Yancheep National Park

a honeycomb shape, where its inventive builders had used cardboard boxes to create different rooms. Others even sported windows.

Some parents and caregivers reveled in the opportunity to unleash their inner child – scrambling on the ground with their kids to help position leaves and branches 'just so'. While others stood back, occasionally offering advice and suggestions.

Once the kids had perfected their cubby houses, they had the opportunity



Main Building cubby houses was popular among kids of all ages.

Photo – Rhianna King/DBCA

Insets (clockwise from top left) A raft of other activities entertained kids on the day.

Photos – Ewen MacGregor/DBCA (1, 2 and 3); Karla Graham/DBCA (4, 5 and 6)



Take a journey to
Cubby Town

Scan this QR code
or visit Parks and Wildlife
Service's 'LANDSCOPE'
playlist on YouTube.



to take part in a raft of other activities, such as mud play, bush craft and music activities hosted by local community and play groups. There was also a Nature Play WA scavenger hunt where clues on the Nature Play WA app (see also 'In review' on page 11) led kids around the park to learn more about the insects that can be found in the area.

Judging by the laughs and squeals of the kids, which even managed to drown out the raucous calls of the flocks of Carnaby cockatoos flying overhead, there was a lot of fun being had on the day.

MORE THAN JUST A GOOD TIME

But, of course, we know from the ever-increasing research that there was a lot more than just fun going on at the Cubby Town event. By engaging in unstructured nature play, kids develop their gross-motor, fine-motor and problem-solving skills. They improve their spatial awareness, develop their imagination and creativity, and have improved social skills and ability to collaborate. Symptoms of ADHD can be lessened and kids who regularly have contact with the natural world, including dirt and plant matter, have stronger immune systems than those who don't.

But, beyond that, kids who spend time in nature enjoying free, unstructured play also learn about the natural environment and get an insight into the role they play in protecting it. And these experiences can form life-long memories, which help shape their decision-making in later life and, hopefully, guide them to become advocates for the environment.

According to Parks and Wildlife Service's Parks and Visitor Services regional leader Ewen MacGregor, events like Cubby Town play an important role in encouraging kids outside.

"It's so important that we activate our natural spaces through events like these to provide opportunities for kids to come and enjoy time in nature," he said.

"We know this kind of event works, as evaluation of last year's event showed an excellent return rate of Cubby Town participants, who either returned to Yanchep National Park or visited other parks around the State," he said.

"After all, our kids are nature's advocates of tomorrow and it's critical that we engage them early so they can develop a love of the environment and experience all the benefits associated with spending time in it."

BACK TO BASICS

Once my kids had completed the construction of their cubby house, put it through a rigorous play test, checked off all the clues on the scavenger hunt, made a gumnut Cyclops with a pasta bowtie at the bush craft table and climbed a few trees, we packed up our picnic and made our way home; kids dirty and exhausted – just as they should be.

Clockwise from top left A scavenger hunt, music and bush craft provided a range of opportunities for fun.

Photos – Rhianna King/DBCA (1, 4 and 5); Ewen MacGregor (2); Karla Graham (3)

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The Cubby Town event was held by Nature Play WA in partnership with DBCA and the Department of Sport and Recreation, with support from the City of Wanneroo. For more information about future Nature Play WA events visit www.natureplaywa.org.au. For more information about Yanchep National Park, visit parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au.