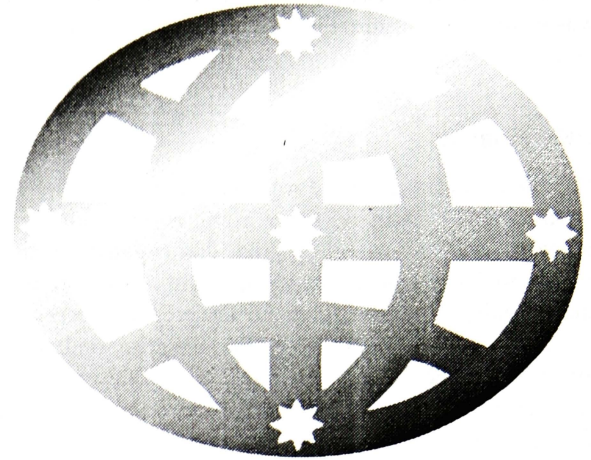# Wildscape—from the Gould League

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In the current climate of Internet popularity, and the growth in the use of learning technologies in the classroom, there is increasing demand for the development of new and engaging web sites for use in schools. Most environmental education web sites and online learning programs still deliver information and continue to 'raise awareness' of environmental issues. The Gould League believes the internet can be used to take environmental education beyond awareness raising and web sites can be developed that empower students and their teachers and deliver both environmental and educational outcomes.

Wildscape is accessed through the Gould League web site and was the first of the Gould League's web-based online learning programs. It was created in response to requests from teachers for assistance with practical school ground environmental projects.

In our experience, many teachers are keen to involve their students in projects to create wildlife habitats around their school but lack the confidence or experience and don't know where to begin. In previous years the Gould League would have provided a 'one on one' consultancy or simply sent information to teachers. This was often time consuming and placed unrealistic demands on our small staff. Instead, we looked at how we could use the world wide web as a way of reaching and helping teachers more efficiently. In 2000, Gould League staff developed Wildscapes as an interactive web site to help schools plan and undertake simple 'real life' projects to attract wildlife and increase biodiversity in the school ground.

Wildscape provides tools such as a bioregion specific plant and animal (biodiversity) database and software to allow students to plant their 'wildscape' habitat online. The website also includes project guides and curriculum-linked teaching activities to enable teachers to develop a Wildscape environmental education program suited to their school.

Features of the Wildscapes web site include:

- Teaching ideas linked to the Curriculum (Science, SOSE and other areas)

- Biodiversity project ideas that can be viewed under the Projects and Tours Button. These include how to prepare planting sites, constructing a pond or marsh, habitat islands, insect grasslands, wildlife corridors and projects to monitor biodiversity). Tours shows schools in action (photo sequences and audio voice over) where students show how they have developed Wildscape projects in their school ground. Further funding is being sought to create additional tours.

- Bioregion match-up which allows users of the web site to find out which Victorian bioregion their school is in and to explore features of each bioregion. Assistance in developing this aspect of the web site was provided by the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment's Land Information Group.

- An animal-plant connector database and software which enables users to choose wildlife to attract to their school ground Wildscapes. The list includes: butterflies and moths, frogs, honeyeaters, mammals, parrots and reptiles. The animal-plant connector allows users to choose animals known to live on their bioregion. It can then be used to choose plants that their selected animals need for food and shelter.

- An online Wildscapes design feature which allows users to take their selection of animals and plants across to a simple 8x4m (scaled) plot and to plant their shrubs along with ponds, rocks and logs. (Each plant has an icon that can be dropped and dragged into place on the computer screen). Users of Wildscapes can view their plans 'side on' or 'top down'. They can save their plans or print them and then return to start a new Wildscapes project. Our web design partners DDSN Interactive are currently developing a labelling system.

- Kids' Activities – Bandicoot Valley – Our budget has only permitted us to develop one interactive game to date. Bandicoot Valley was first presented in the Gould League Endangered Species Kit. It can be downloaded as a simple Board game or played online.

- Links to other good sites

- Contact information for Victoria's indigenous nurseries.

Wildscape was funded with assistance from the Telematics Development Fund Trust and the William Buckland Foundation as a pilot project and has also won two Omni Intermedia Awards. Winning the Alan Strom Eureka Award for Environmental Education was a great honour and the Award and recognition has proved a great motivator for staff.

Last year, the Gould League was approached to develop the Flora for Fauna web site for the Nursery and Garden Industry Association and Environment Australia. Flora for Fauna <www.floraforfauna.com.au> has been designed in the same 'linear' manner as Wildscape – but allows website users to select native plants available from Flora for Fauna Nurseries rather than indigenous plants and uses 'Growing Regions' instead of Bioregions. Flora for Fauna has become extremely popular with gardeners around Australia with over 1,100,000 hits in four months, and web site users spending on average 14 minutes using the website (the industry average is around 5 minutes).

The Gould league has another new interactive website about to be launched. Future-scapes was developed with Ericsson as part of an international Ericsson Award won by the Gould League in 2000. Future-scapes, based on the popular Australia 2020 teaching booklets, allows students (and others) to look at the impact of their lifestyles on their future and helps students set short term and long term environmental goals – with reminder emails sent to them from time to time. Future-scapes will be launched in March 2002. Visit our web site soon for more details <www.gould.edu.au>.🐨