

# ABC NEWS

## Adelaide Hills students take school's pet insects home for sleepovers

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PHOTO: Year 1 and 2 students Oscar, Jasmine and Larissa with their classroom pets. (Supplied: Nairne Primary School)

### Students at an Adelaide Hills primary school invite insects from their school's invertebrate family home for sleepovers.

MAP: Adelaide 5000

Nairne Primary School is currently home to 10 varieties of mini beasts including: stick insects, caterpillars, giant millipedes, scorpions, tarantulas, beetles, praying mantises, and three giant burrowing cockroaches.

School services officer Leanne Stevens, known around the school as the 'bug lady', said the Australian giant burrowing cockroaches were a class favourite.

"Originally we had one called Polly here at school and I used her for a about a year or so but she passed away; we had the circle of life and it was quite hard here on the children at school," Ms Stevens said.

She said all the insects were well-loved and cared for by teachers and students alike.

"When I have a surplus of bugs, and children are keen, which they are often ... I often will give them eggs or nymphs [babies] so they can hand-rear them," Ms Stevens said.

"They originally just associated bugs with just being bugs, but then they realised that they had personalities and they were actually a pet."



**PHOTO:** An Australian giant burrowing cockroach sits in the hands of a student to show its size. (Supplied: Nairne Primary School)

## Meet the classroom cockroaches: Coco, Millie and Tracer

The Australian giant burrowing cockroach has been known to weigh up to 35 grams — more than a fun-sized chocolate bar — making it the heaviest cockroach in the world.

Ms Stevens said the kids loved the cockroaches because they looked big and scary, but they were actually very gentle and easy to handle.

"They've got their own personalities, so the kids actually know which cockroach is which," she said.

"In class you can often hear them talking and chatting with each other, they sort of make a squeaking noise and sort of click-clack noise."

Ms Stevens said a competition was held by the students to name the male and two female cockroaches.

"Millie is super shy, Coco is more boisterous and will often move to the front of the tank so she can watch the children in class, and Tracer moves around so you see him from time to time," she said.

The Australian giant burrowing cockroach can live up to 10 years and measures up to 80 millimetres.

Although cockroaches have been associated as dirty creepy crawlies, the giant species were cleaner than you might think.

"They're very clean, they often clean themselves after we've handled them because we're actually dirty to them," Ms Stevens said.



**PHOTO:** Students are not afraid of these insects. (Supplied: Nairne Primary School)

## Insects captured in school's curriculum

Nairne Primary School has been incorporating insects in its classes from reception to Year 7.

Ms Stevens said they featured in maths, art and science lessons as part of the school's focus on sustainable living.

"So art would be life drawings; science could be life cycles, anatomy; maths could be measurement, weight, length, things like that," Ms Stevens said.

Ms Stevens hoped the school would become parents to some baby cockroaches.

"We're hoping to breed the giant cockroaches because we've got two females and a male, so we're hoping that maybe later this year we get the pitter-patter of little feet."

Nairne entered its bugs into this year's Mount Barker Show, taking home a first, second and third prize for best presented insects.



PHOTO: Nairne Primary School teacher and student at the 2017 Mount Barker Show with their prize-winning insects. (Supplied: Nairne Primary School)

## Cockroaches make great mums

Director of the Australian National Insect Collection, David Yeates, said research showed Australian giant burrowing cockroaches were unusually good parents.

"The mothers live with the little baby cockroaches for a number of months protecting them in the nest and feeding them," Mr Yeates said.

"This is quite a fascinating piece of behaviour that protects the immature stages and helps them develop."

He said most people did not realise cockroaches were such loving creatures, especially toward their young.

"Perhaps this species of cockroaches even love their babies a little bit too much," Mr Yeates said.

"Other cockroaches, and other insects for that matter, often scatter their eggs fairly indiscriminately and don't have anything to do with them at all.

"In fact they may forget they've scattered them and come back and eat them sometimes ... it's all fair game out there."

**Topics:** invertebrates---insects-and-arachnids, animal-science, science-and-technology, education, science, earth-sciences, adelaide-5000, nairne-5252, remark-5341