



Te Mahia School students with Whangawehi freshwater monitoring co-ordinator Peter Bowen. They are learning how to monitor water quality.

Valuing water, wildlife

AN award-winning community initiative had Te Mahia School students learning first-hand about water quality and eeling in a workshop earlier this month.

Whangawehi Catchment Management Group has worked with Te Mahia School since March this year.

Te Mahia School principal Nicky O'Brien, wanted students to learn traditional knowledge in a series of workshops within their Enviroschool framework.

Run by local kuia and kaumatua exploring Maori themes of tikanga, native plants, rongoa, water and fish monitoring, bird watching and weaving, the unique series of workshops has attracted interest and support from the World Wildlife Fund New Zealand, Department of Conservation, New Zealand Fish and Game, Hawke's Bay Regional Council and the National Aquarium of New Zealand through the Freshwater Education Programme.

On December 12, Whangawehi freshwater monitoring group co-ordinator Arthur Bowen and his team took several Te Mahia students along a nearby creek to assess the water quality and do some fish monitoring. They learned how to

measure and compare water quality in different habitats.

While they were in the bush Mr Bowen and Edward Hammond talked about the native tree species and their traditional uses, especially for rongoa and culinary purposes.

A hinaki set the night before gave the students a lot of fun and they were impressed to find the eels caught were the endangered longfin eel.

The workshop was part of the Whangawehi Catchment community-based water monitoring programme funded by Nga Whenua Rahui since January 2013.

The Whangawehi group was awarded the Heritage and Environment award and the 2013 Trustpower Wairoa Community Supreme Award.

The group of landowners, tangata whenua, marae, local government agencies and local school representatives is working to lessen the impact from a wastewater plant and lead environmental care and education in the community.

If you want to learn more about the group's activities, go along to their annual community day on January 24, at Tuahuru Marae — powhiri at 9.30am.