



**Finalist:** Narelle Debenham is in line for a Pride of Australia award. Picture: CHRIS SCOTT

## A natural teacher

**Nathan Mawby**

**TEACHER** Narelle Debenham has left the classroom behind to reconnect kids with the wide outdoors.

Driven by a fear parents have lost the confidence to explore the outdoors with their children, Ms Debenham, 42, leads an expanding group of young explorers.

They traipse the bush around Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula, with parents or grandparents in tow.

The Natured Kids program is aimed at children in their formative years, from babies up to five.

Ms Debenham

Herald Sun Sunday

pride  
of australia  
medal 2011

Proud partner DURACELL  
EVERYWHERE

**FINALIST**

started her program four years ago when she felt activities such as planting and nurturing community vegie gardens and bushwalking had fallen by the wayside.

She discovered parents were loath to trust their children around water.

"Parents and even grandparents are a little unsure about

river crossings, even if it's only a tiny little creek," Ms Debenham said.

"But once they are confident you can't keep them away."

Ms Debenham's work has seen her invited to local and international conferences on children's interaction with nature.

She says she believes it's time for others and the State Government to develop programs in other communities.

Her efforts to nurture kids with nature have secured her as a finalist in the Environment Medal category of this year's Pride of Australia awards.