

# Tall poppies inspire science study

By BEN WYLD

A schools visit program involving some of the country's best young scientists is giving NSW secondary science students an insider's view to cutting-edge research.

Glen Sawle, manager of the science unit in the education department's K-12 curriculum directorate, said the Tall Poppies Reaching Students Program aims to encourage more secondary students to study science in the senior years and consider future career paths in the field.

"The program has as its main focus students in Years 10 and 11," Mr Sawle said.

"Year 10 [students] are thinking about future subject selections and Year 11 are thinking about their university programs, future career opportunities and pathways.

"This program makes students aware of the emerging opportunities for careers in areas of current scientific research."

Hundreds of students from around the state have attended the school forums which typically involve three emerging young scientists – all recent Australian Institute of Policy and Science Young Tall Poppy award winners – presenting their research to students.

In a visit to Parramatta's Arthur Phillip High School earlier this term, Dr Douglas Aberdeen, Dr Alaina Ammit and Dr Nathan Daczko told students about artificial intelligence, asthma research and tectonic plate theory.

"Students get to hear from a variety of scientists across a range of fields with the big advantage for students being that they get to meet these people first-hand, learn about their work and then ask them questions," Mr Sawle said.

At Gosford High School students learnt about current and emerging research in robotics, solar energy and nanotechnology when Dr

Williams' work mapping nearby Tuggerah Lake with robots.

"The students were very interested in robotics and Dr Williams had some wonderful footage of robots," Dr Butler said.

"Afterwards one student asked him whether he thought robots would eventually take over the world ... it was an interesting question."

Dr Butler said the school visits gave students a great opportunity to see "real scientists".

"The scientists are young and able to talk to students about what it's like studying science and having a career in science, and they're able to convey their excitement."

The forums have largely been held throughout the Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle areas over the past three years, although other locations have included Armidale, Dubbo and Forster.

Mr Sawle said there are hopes to expand the program, which can



Photo EVA SCHATZ

Gadgets and gizmos ... Dr Stefan Williams with a GPS tracking device.

Stefan Williams, Dr Leigh Sheppard and Dr Adam Micolich visited.

Mark Butler, head teacher science at Gosford High, said the students were very interested in the presentations, particularly Dr

draw about 300 students to each forum as it moves to regional areas in NSW.

"Significant numbers of students are coming into contact with young Australian researchers through the program ... and we've got anecdotal comments from teachers that students have rethought subject selections following the forum simply because their eyes have been opened to opportunities they didn't realise existed," Mr Sawle said.

"It's part of a suite of important initiatives to address the issue of shortages of people going into science and science careers."

The schools program, part of the Tall Poppy Campaign, is a joint project between the Australian Institute of Policy and Science and the NSW Department of Education and Training with part sponsorship from the NSW Office for Science and Medical Research.