

The Great Shark Egg Case Hunt - Behind the Scenes

What I was thinking...

When I was little, we often holidayed along the South Australian coast, and wandered the beach looking at the shells and seaglass that had washed up. I remember finding the egg case of a Port Jackson shark: a weird, almost alien object. So I was super excited to see the characters in the book living out my own childhood, especially Noah, who is beachcombing just like I did, and William, who is actually on the South Australian coast!

While making the book, I went snorkelling for the first time in my life! It was really cold and I didn't see any egg cases, but I did see some anemones and sponges and fish, and something that was maybe an octopus. I do hope lots of readers manage to find egg cases. But more than that, I hope the book encourages its readers to spend more time in and near the ocean, getting to know all the creatures who live there, and learning about everything that washes up. It's a lot of fun!

How I did it...

To get better at drawing the underwater world, I watched a lot of videos made by snorkelers and divers. Then I used the website iNaturalist to make sure my animals were locationally appropriate, and accurately drawn. The people who film these videos, upload these photos and check them for accuracy, are all also citizen scientists. And they play a vital role in a world where AI generated "photos" can easily trick those of us who haven't experienced something firsthand.

The ocean connects us, but it looks and feels different in different places. My experience of the South Australian coast is a long way from Lily's in Alaska. I created separate colour palettes for each of the environments to help differentiate them and emphasise the global nature of the project.

Egg cases will usually be found hiding under other things, or tucked between them. Collage seemed the right medium for the task of depicting the natural world as a many-layered place.

I used watercolour and pencil to create all the collage pieces, and layered them up together with blu-tack and glue. This is the same method I used for *It Takes A Village*, and I create a little tutorial for that book, which you can see [here](#).

Who else was involved...

The author, Kasey Whitelaw, is one half of the marine biologist duo behind SEA Kids Alliance, an organisation dedicated to sparking curiosity, and inspiring a love of nature and science in kids. Her passion and enthusiasm are what gives this book its heart.

Thank you to Melinda for sending me the manuscript and bringing me onto the project! And to the rest of the team at CSIRO Publishing: I'm always proud to be working with you to bring science to kids, and this book is such a direct example of that, as an invitation for kids to join in too. Thank you for all you do for our world!

The Great (Shark) Eggcase Hunt itself is run by The Shark Trust, who work to safeguard the future of sharks, skates and chimaeras. They started this citizen science project in the UK in 2003 and launched in Australia in 2023, in partnership with CSIRO.