

Serventy Conservation Medal for 2003

The Serventy Conservation Medal for 2003 was made to Lance Ferris of the Australian Seabird Rescue team. Lance's life and work has been featured on the ABC program *Australian Story*. Lance initiated and built a team of supporters to save and rescue injured seabirds, especially the Australian pelican which is so often viciously caught up in fishing hooks or choked on plastic bags.

Lance's acceptance speech

“Whilst we deal with endangered and threatened species, the mission statement of Australian Seabird Rescue is simple; to relieve the suffering. To help describe the last eleven years of our work I would like to draw an analogy to illustrate the life and times of Australian Seabird Rescue. That analogy is like a long, hard-fought game of tennis.

“And the tennis ball... is us. “At one end of the court, serving the ball is an angry, strong and motivated player, perhaps someone like John McEnroe. On this side of the net, we are reminded of a grievously injured pelican sitting alone on the banks of the Ballina River. The air is filled with memories of hundreds suffering the same fate. We had only scratched the surface. Those early years were filled with mixed feelings of anger and frustration. We couldn't understand why there was nothing being done. Our calls for help seemed to fall on deaf ears - almost like no-one cared, and that's something that we were not prepared to accept. “John McEnroe slogs the ball, and as it passes over the net, something changes. On Leighton Hewitt's side, we find ourselves in a different dimension. “More and more, we achieve success at capture and rehabilitation of injured birds. We extend our rescue expertise to sea turtles and succeed yet again. We felt motivated and excited that we had made a difference and so we carried on, relieving the suffering, one animal at a time... and finally, the world listened. “At times we struck the net, but in each case, there has been a dedicated volunteer, a financial donation, some media coverage or political support to carry us through. Our first sponsorship was from the Ballina Shire Council, who granted us free ferry travel to South Ballina. I was so excited that I phoned all our volunteers.



*Lance Ferris was presented with the Serventy Conservation Medal for 2003
by The Hon Bob Debus MP, Minister for the Environment
and Dr Vincent Serventy AM*

“The free ferry saved us \$1.20 a month! And now I marvel each time I see our offshore boat, our inflatable vessel, our riverboat, and our 4WD Toyota Troopy. Support rolled in from Zodiac, Pioneer, NSW Fisheries, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Landcare, Coastcare, and more recently, the Tony and Lisette Lewis Foundation, not to mention the dozens of businesses and service clubs.

“In November 2002, Dr Bashir took the time to open our turtle rehabilitation facility. Her words, “What a privilege it is to be in such a wonderful place of healing,” have fortified us through many trying times.

“So during this long game of tennis, this war between our obstacles and our relief, we learn. With each new obstacle we face we are armed with more knowledge, more experience and more support to surmount the seemingly insurmountable. And so the game continues. And so too, do we.

“While I am honoured and greatly humbled to be presented with this award today, I would like to take this opportunity to formally acknowledge the team of people who each deserve to accept this award with me, because without them Australian Seabird Rescue would have faded into the history books long ago.

“I would have liked to bring every person responsible for getting ASR to where it is today, however, we would have needed Stadium Australia... and it was booked out. Instead I’m proud to have with me, a small contingent of valued volunteers to represent the hundreds of people who have helped us over the last decade. “Marny Bonner, co-founder of ASR, who has pretty much sacrificed all remnants of a normal life to work towards the ASR dream.

“Rochelle Ferris, my daughter who has inherited the genetic predisposition to keep fighting and has provided research assistance in her capacity as a Marine Biologist.

“Ryan and Kristen, two of our most valued volunteers who have stuck with us now for longer than most and who never fail to be there when we need them.



*Ryan and Kristen with the Hon Bob Debus MP
Lance Ferris and John Millard*

“And Mr John Millard, producer of the ABC’s Australian Story.

“In presenting me with this award you have thanked us all for our efforts, and given us encouragement to continue our work. And for that, we sincerely thank you.

“The gathering of special people in this room, represents enough motivation, wisdom and influence to change the world... and in fact that’s exactly what we are all doing... changing the world.

“We sincerely appreciate this recognition, but it represents more than the culmination of eleven years of hard work. It is a stepping-stone to future achievements beyond our wildest dreams. It’s an Ace served by Leighton that will help us immensely to continue the relief of suffering. This day, this recognition, will fortify us for many years and hard times that will inevitably confront us.

“In the end, it will be game, set and match to us all.

“Thank you.”



Lance Ferris and Marny Bonner