

2011 WPSA Serventy Conservation Medal

The winner of the Serventy Conservation Medal for 2011 is **Jenny Maclean** of Mareeba, North Queensland, for her long-standing contribution to saving the endangered spectacled flying fox.

Jenny, a physiotherapist by profession, founded the Tolga Bat Hospital over 20 years ago to rescue spectacled flying foxes paralysed by tick bites. (Because of the loss of their natural food sources, the bats have been forced to seek food at lower levels where they come into contact with ticks causing their already depleted numbers to be threatened even more.) Since that time, she and a dedicated band of volunteers, from across Australia and also from overseas, have devoted endless hours to the task. However, Jenny has not confined herself to rescuing the animals. She has developed an education centre at the hospital and regularly devotes her time to educating the public about the contribution bats make to the ecology of the region. She also makes the hospital and her expertise available to university students and staff conducting research.

Jenny was also responsible for forming *Wildlife Friendly Fencing* which has alerted people across Australia to the damage barbed wire fences do, not only to bats, but to other wildlife which fall upon them. Jenny has shown how to minimise the damage that these fences can do. Her dedication and her long-standing contribution to wildlife conservation make her a worthy winner of the Serventy Medal.

Response by Jenny Maclean

I feel very honoured to receive the Serventy Conservation Medal, and thank the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia for this prestigious award.

I would also like to thank my bat colleagues for the nomination and for their letters of support: I truly value the confidence you have in my work through Tolga Bat Hospital.

I began working with bats in 1990, the year that tick paralysis was discovered in spectacled flying foxes on the Atherton Tablelands.

It's not easy being the 'bat lady' in a small rural community - especially in a large fruit-growing area. Even though many local farmers now have netting, the stigma of bats in orchards lives on. Like many communities around Australia, we have a conflict situation with nearby residents at a local flying fox colony. It would be a lot easier to be a 'koala lady'.

I have been the president of Tolga Bat Hospital since its incorporation in 2002. The hospital has grown and grown, becoming my whole life.

We are on the Atherton Tablelands about an hour inland from Cairns. Like many others, we deal with all the usual issues affecting bats – their poor public image, entanglement in netting and barbed wire, general trauma and orphans.

But then we have the extra burden of tick paralysis. It affects thousands of flying foxes here from September to January, bringing up to 500 orphans into care annually.

We have been coping with this animal welfare crisis for the last 15 years, and fortunately have developed networks and partnerships that make this possible. We attract a large number of volunteers who work long hours to cope with the huge workload.

One of the very rewarding aspects of this work is watching the friendships that develop amongst the volunteers, their steadily increasing confidence in themselves, and how their volunteering is a catalyst in their lives.

Our core business though is the conservation of bats and their habitat, through rescue and landcare work, education and research.

Education is an essential component of our work with bats as they are so misunderstood in our Australian communities. We do this through our onsite Visitor Centre, the local Environmental Education Centre for schools, the Wildlife Friendly Fencing and Netting projects, and general advocacy work year round.

This is the International year of the bat. It is shameful that the Liberal National Party in Queensland have said they will bring back lethal means of crop protection if they win Government in the upcoming state election.

This will allow shooting of bats and almost certainly a return to the use of electric grids. This sort of animal cruelty was found to be inhumane and unacceptable by Queensland's Animal Welfare Advisory Council. Both methods leave their victims dying from severe injuries, often slowly. The young also die slowly, from starvation, back at camp or clinging to their mothers.

Please go to a fabulous new website "dontshootbats.com" to learn more about this issue. Sadly, NSW still allows for the issuing of permits to shoot bats. It is appalling that state governments are not only prepared to sanction animal cruelty, but allow the killing of threatened species when solutions such as netting are available for most farmers.

I would like to thank the Society for its ongoing efforts on behalf of flying-foxes and for supporting the "Don't Shoot Bats" campaign.

Thank you again for the Serventy Conservation Medal for 2011. Your support for our work goes a long way to motivating us to keep on keeping on.

We are looking to expand our facilities this year as well as looking seriously at succession planning. I expect to be actively involved for at least another ten years but, like all volunteer organisations, we need to be looking to the younger generations for the future.

