

# 2018 Serventy Conservation Award

The award for 2018 was presented to Lorraine Vass of Lismore, New South Wales. Lorraine has been, for 19 years, the driving force behind Friends of the Koala, a Lismore-based group. Her efforts have made the whole Lismore region more koala conscious and helped stabilise, and possibly increase, the koala population in the region. Lorraine has overseen an active education program and has forged a close association with local schools. She also has established a close relationship with universities, particularly the University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and Southern Cross University. Lorraine is a member of the Office of Environment and Heritage's Saving our Species Koala Expert Panel.

Lorraine is a committed koala advocate and campaigner of nearly 20 years' standing, 15 of them as president of Friends of the Koala, the Northern Rivers region's peak koala conservation organisation and a respected stakeholder in koala recovery across New South Wales.

Under Lorraine's leadership Friends of the Koala developed and then strengthened a strategic and holistic approach to its conservation mission encompassing licensed koala rescue, rehabilitation and release, habitat protection and enhancement, advocacy, and policy reform and community education, adding value to its licensed work by partnering various academic institutions and unaffiliated scientists in research on koala-related issues.



Lorraine Vass accepting her 2018 Serventy Conservation Award from Clive Williams.

Since stepping down as president in mid-2017, she continues to petition government, pursues her research interests and remains active in a number of organisations. As Friends of the Koala's past president and patron, she mentors the current leadership when called upon, maintains a hand in setting the group's strategic direction, represents the group in several forums and champions its achievements on social media and elsewhere.

## Acceptance speech from Lorraine Vass

Thank you to the Australian Wildlife Society for this Award. I congratulate the Society for 110 years of exceptional conservation work to save Australia's unique and precious wildlife and the various habitats that support it.

I came to koala conservation quite late in life – post-retirement. We relocated from Darwin to the Northern Rivers and purchased a small rural property through which koalas passed. Soon after, in 2000, we joined Friends of the Koala, which operates out of Lismore and the rest, as they say, is history.

It is humbling to receive such a prestigious award, and when I made the time to look back over past recipients, I was more humbled. I share the Award with the wonderful teams of people who have also volunteered their passion, time and commitment to strengthening and expanding Friends of the Koala's koala conservation mission over these past 19 years.

The koala holds a special place in the Australian Wildlife Society, the tremendous effort to end the fur trade in the '20s and '30s attracting widespread public attention to the Society's work.

Koala survival is still in the balance. More than ever, koala conservation remains highly political because in so much of the koala's remaining range we humans are competing for space. The impacts of climate change on the species are already becoming apparent.

I sincerely believe that the koala's future is in our hands and that we can succeed in preserving these much-loved animals for the enjoyment of future generations. Thank you for the recognition of the koala's plight implicit in the Serventy Conservation Award. Let us all continue to fight for the koala in any way we can.