2019 Community Wildlife Conservation Award

The Community Wildlife Conservation Award is awarded to a community group that is making a significant contribution to wildlife preservation in Australia.

The award for 2019 was presented to Belgian Gardens State School of Belgian Gardens, Townsville. This school, for a number of years, has been an active participant in the conservation of the black-throated finch (*Poephila cincta*). It has an active partnership with the Northern Queensland Dry Tropics and black-throated finch recovery program. The school has a specially designed enquiry unit for year four students. Under this program, the students learn about the life cycle of the finch, the threats it faces, and the actions taken by science to help it. Learning is not just theoretical but also practical. The school maintains its own aviary and students are involved in the care of the birds and make regular observations. Learning is not confined to the students, as the school informs the community through its school newsletter. Furthermore, an open day was held to educate the community about the program. The event attracted 400 people.

The program is designed to teach students basic science principles, while they have the opportunity to meet experts in the field. They are also encouraged to transfer their knowledge to other endangered species, some of which are bred at the school. These include the golden-shouldered parrot (*Psephotus chrysopterygius*), Gouldian finch (*Erythrura gouldiae*), and the clownfish (*Amphiprioninae*). The school is recognised as a significant breeder of the finch. It has bred over 150 finches since being involved in the program. This is an exciting program promising great future benefits, as young people become engaged in conservation activities and, in turn, assist in educating their local community.

Acceptance speech from Belgian Gardens State School

Belgian Gardens State School is honoured to be the recipient of the 2019 Community Wildlife Conservation Award. Our students and school community are proud of the work we undertake, to learn about threatened and endangered species of animals. We feel it is important to provide our students with real-life, hands-on learning opportunities. For example, having live breeding black-throated finches at our school is far more engaging than reading about them from a book or website.

At Belgian Gardens State School, we have several breeding programs for threatened and endangered animals. We breed black-throated finches, Gouldian finches, golden-shouldered parrots, and clownfish. One of our science units, for year four, focuses on the black-throated finch. Students research their life cycle, habitats, threats they face, and what can be done to ensure their survival in the wild. Guest speakers from Northern Queensland Dry Tropics also share with students the work being done to preserve this unique finch. Students also are responsible for the day-to-day feeding and provide a varied, nutritious diet for all our breeding birds. We have had a very successful breeding program over the last eight years, breeding more than 150 black-throated and Gouldian finches and 23 golden-shouldered parrots.

Our school also has a special room called Reef BG, where we have 20 tanks displaying a variety of freshwater and saltwater fish species. Our primary focus, for year five and six students, is the breeding of clownfish. We have bred over 200 clownfish in the last eight years, selling our fish back to pet shops and fish wholesalers. Our motto is "every clownfish we sell is one less taken from the reef".

With the $2500 sponsorship, we intend to upgrade our breeding facilities for our clownfish. At Belgian Gardens State School, we feel it is important to educate our students and the wider community on issues faced by Australia's fauna. A special thank you to Associate Professor Julie Old for nominating us for this amazing award.

Toby Salmon, Keira West and Jarrah Walker accepting the Community Conservation Award on behalf of Belgian Gardens State School.