

# 2019 Youth Conservation Award

The youth of Australia make significant contributions to the conservation movement through innovative projects and ideas. It is young people who can drive lasting and sustainable change and who will become the next ambassadors in environmental conservation and hopefully the successors to the current board of the Australian Wildlife Society. We aim to inspire young people to have a stake in environmental conservation by rewarding and recognising their efforts.

The award for 2019 was presented to Caitlin Gallagher of Bundanoon, New South Wales. Caitlin has been focusing on supporting efforts to reduce the incidence of sarcoptic mange in bare-nosed wombat populations. Furthermore, she has shown a commitment to wombat conservation in the field by setting-up and monitoring burrow flaps to treat wombats, as well as being heavily involved in fundraising and educating the public more broadly regarding wombat conservation and sarcoptic mange.

Caitlin volunteers her time every Saturday morning at WCB - Wombat Care Bundanoon, assisting John Creighton to treat wombats for mange. Caitlin also regularly checks road-killed wombats for in-pouch joeys. Caitlin collects recyclable bottles and returns them for 10 cents each. Caitlin has now raised \$1200 which purchases 15 litres of cydectin, a medication that is used to treat wombats for mange. Fifteen litres can treat up to 35 mange-affected wombats. Caitlin also presents at conferences and local schools to help raise awareness of the plight of the common wombat and encourage conservation action.

## Acceptance speech from Caitlin Gallagher

Being presented with the Youth Conservation Award came as a pleasant surprise to me. Thank you for this amazing honour. When I first started working alongside John Creighton, I never thought that I would have both a national and international impact on a variety of individuals and their conservation efforts. I have collected thousands of bottles and recycled them, preventing them from ending up in landfill and to assist in the purchase of wombat medication. As a community, many people from Bundanoon have contributed to this recycling program, which I am eternally grateful.

Every day that I spend working alongside John is personally rewarding to me, whether it be: treating mange-affected wombats, driving around at night looking for injured wildlife, completing roadside rescues, providing supplementary food for wildlife affected by the recent bushfires, or assisting with the provision of education within our local community.

Receiving this award reflects the personal satisfaction that I feel in being part of the bigger picture. I know that my actions, however big or small, are having a positive impact on Australia's native wildlife and enhancing our communities' ability to show more respect for the delicate ecosystems in which we live.

When I first met John, I found him harvesting grass for drought-affected wombats and other wildlife in Taralga, New South Wales. I approached John and asked, "is there a way that I can be involved in the wombat conservation work you do?" John explained to me that he treats mange-affected wombats in the Southern Highlands region. I mentioned that I would be more than willing to contribute and assist him with his efforts if given the opportunity. I have been helping John for three years with the treatment of mange-affected wombats.

In 2018, I founded a fundraiser whereby I returned recyclable bottles for 10 cents each, to raise funds for mange medication known as cydectin. It was the expense of the treatment that initiated my action to fundraise. This fundraiser is ongoing, and so far we have raised over \$1200, which means we have returned 12,000 individual bottles and cans.

In 2019, I was invited to attend a meeting held by the Rotary Club of Bowral-Mittagong to provide a speech about how I am involved with the treatment of mange-affected wombats and how I became involved with Wombat Care Bundanoon. As a result of my efforts, the Rotary Club presented me with a cheque to put towards purchasing medication for wombats affected by sarcoptic mange. Since 2018, my fundraiser has paid for 15 litres of cydectin, which has treated up to 35 mange-affected wombats.

Thank you again for presenting me with the Youth Conservation Award. I am so humbled to be the recipient of such a prestigious award.

In 2020, I pledge to continue my commitment to John Creighton in treating mange-affected wombats in the Southern Highlands and consider both myself and John as 'Bundanoon's wildlife warriors'!



Assoc Prof Julie Old presented the Youth Conservation Award for 2019 to Caitlin Gallagher.