

2020 Serventy Conservation Award

The prestigious Serventy Conservation Award was inaugurated in 1999 to commemorate the outstanding conservation work by the Serventy family members – Vincent Serventy, his brother Doctor Dominic Serventy and his sister Lucy Serventy. Each member of the Serventy family has given a lifetime of commitment to the conservation of Australia's wildlife. The award is intended to recognise those who labour in the field for a love of nature and a determination that it should be conserved. Often, these have been non-scientists who have earned their conservation skills through pure hard work.

The award for 2020 was presented to Professor Kevin Kenneally AM of Scarborough, Western Australia.

As a young boy, Kevin was captivated by the natural world, and he knew he wanted to study and work in the environmental field. In 1964, Kevin moved to the University of Western Australia's Botany Department, where he worked under Professor and mentor Brian Grieve, who fostered Kevin's interest in Western Australia's botany.

In 1974, Kevin visited the Kimberley, where he spent a month there as part of a biological survey of Prince Regent River Nature Reserve, during which time he fell in love with the area. He has since taken part in every major biological survey of the Kimberley, and it was in the Kimberley that Kevin developed a deep appreciation for Western Australia's Indigenous cultures.

Kevin has been a true warrior for wildlife conservation over the past fifty years, promoting and advancing nature studies and wildlife conservation in Western Australia and Australia more broadly. His work has been a life of public service where he has gone far beyond his positions' requirements. He is an Adjunct Professor with The University of Western Australia, School of Agriculture and Environment, and The University of Notre Dame, Australia Nulungu Research Institute. Kevin has published numerous books on the botany and biology of Western Australia and over two hundred research papers. His research has focused on the Kimberley and Top End of Australia, documenting and advising the government on the region's wildlife.

Kevin is a past President (and Honorary Life Member) of the Western Australian Naturalists' Club and the Kimberly Society. He has also been the President of the Western Australian Gould League at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre for over thirty-five years. Kevin was the inaugural scientific director of the multidisciplinary LANDSCOPE Expeditions program. The program provided volunteers with the opportunity to be involved in hands-on wildlife research led by Australian and overseas scientists. Over seventeen years, the citizen science program involved over 1,000 volunteers and raised two million dollars for wildlife research.

Kevin's interests are in collaborative projects that build long-term relationships that benefit communities. Kevin is a worthy recipient of the 2020 Serventy Conservation Award for such an outstanding lifelong contribution to wildlife conservation, science, and education.

Acceptance Speech from Professor Kevin Kenneally AM

I am deeply honoured to receive the prestigious 2020 Serventy Conservation Award, and I thank the Australian Wildlife Society for its recognition of my life-long work.

I suspect I am one of a small number of people who had the rare privilege of spending time with Dominic (referred to as Dom), Vincent, and Lucy Serventy. Dom was the eldest and Vincent the youngest of eight children born to Victor and Antica Serventy, who had come from Croatia early last century, met on the Kalgoorlie goldfields and moved to an orchard and vineyard at Bickley, outside Perth, Western Australia. It was here where young Dom began observing and recording the Darling Scarp and Swan Coastal Plain birds. Wherever he went, Dom maintained a meticulous journal, a notebook and pencil always in his pocket, a habit instilled in him by Ludwig Glauert of the Western Australian Museum while Dom was still a schoolboy. He would pass this valuable piece of advice to many a young naturalist.

Many people know of Vincent's fascinating and exciting life through his biographical memoir *An Australian Life: memoirs of a Naturalist, Conservationist, Traveller and Writer* published in 1999. However, less well known is the enormous contribution made to natural history and wildlife conservation made by his brother Dom. It has been said that Dom was one of the nation's greatest ornithologists and one of the last contacts with the pioneering naturalists of the Australian Region. He was a stimulating person, inspiring later generations of naturalists, myself included, with the thrill of the natural world and the discoveries yet to be made.

I was first introduced to Dom at a Western Australian Naturalists' Club meeting in the mid-1960s. About the same time, Vincent had decided to pack up his family and move to the east coast. I only caught up with Vincent when he returned to Perth to visit family



Suzanne Medway AM and Minister Matthew Kean MP presenting Professor Kevin Kenneally AM the 2020 Serventy Conservation Award.

and friends. Lucy, their sister, was an accountant who worked for the Attorney Generals Department and served as the Western Australian Naturalists' Club treasurer, a position she held for thirty years. Dom, a Cambridge graduate, was an ornithologist who worked for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and became internationally recognised for his thirty-year study of the migration patterns and the biology of mutton birds (*Puffinus tenuirostris*).

The Perth Wildlife Show, first conceived by Vincent in the 1950s with the support of Harry Butler (long before his highly successful television wildlife program), was held at Perth Town Hall and was packed out by thousands of Western Australian school children and the general public wishing to see and learn about Australian wildlife. In those days, live exhibits were brought in from all over the state by train and bus. I remember going to the Perth railway station to collect buckets of wildflower specimens sent in by club members for display. Vincent and Harry would give lectures and display animals to an appreciative audience, and Lucy would handle the finances. Remember, this was a time before the internet and when much of Australia's wildlife was unknown to the urban-dwelling population.

As a young man, visiting Dom at his Everett Street home in Nedlands was like walking into 'Aladdin's Cave' as he had an eclectic taste. Dom collected Australian items, including rare first editions of explorer's books and journals, antique silver and glassware, and English horse brasses. He also had a collection of prints of prominent Australians by the great artists featured in *Vanity Fair*, the title of a Victorian periodical published in England between 1838 and 1914 and became known as the cream of the period's society magazines. Dom was always eager to explain how these items came into his possession and their historical significance. Any visit was an amazing learning experience.

Also of interest were the types of visitors you might encounter at Dom's house. Because of his international reputation and a wide circle of friends, Dom's guests included people such as naturalist, filmmaker, and author Sir David Attenborough, Australian landscape artist John Olsen, artist Sir Russell Drysdale, Professor of Zoology Alan John (Jock) Marshall, Professor James Allen Keast (who started the first natural history series on Australian television in 1958-1960), and one of the 20th century's leading evolutionary biologists Professor Ernst Mayer from Harvard University.

On one field trip, Dom was accompanied by Marshall and Drysdale, who described their adventures in *Journey Among Men* published in 1966. One of Dom's most distinguished visitors was General Sir Gerald Lathbury, a senior British military figure who had served as Aide-de-camp general to the Queen and was later Governor of Gibraltar. Lathbury was a keen ornithologist and served as Vice President of Sir Peter Scott's 'Wildlife Trust' at Slimbridge, England.

As a primary school student in the 1950s in Perth, I was greatly influenced by the radio talks on nature by Crosbie Morrison. His 'Along the track with Crosbie Morrison' led me into a career in botany and natural history. I joined the Council of the Western Australian Naturalists' Club in 1964 and was given two years leave-of-absence (1967-1968) when I was conscripted into the army during the Vietnam War. After my discharge, I re-joined the Council of the Western Australian Naturalists' Club and went on to serve in multiple roles, including convenor of the junior naturalist's (1975-1980), Honorary Editor of the club's scientific journal *The West Australian Naturalist* (1980-1990), Vice-President and President (1977-1978).

In 1973, I left the Botany Department at The University of Western Australia and joined the Western Australian Herbarium staff as a research botanist – the start of a forty-year study of the Kimberley and Top End of Australia's plants and vegetation. One project was to document the flora of the Dampier Peninsula north of Broome. With the assistance of the newly established Broome Botanical Society members and the willing cooperation of the local Aboriginal communities, *Broome and Beyond: Plants and People of the Dampier Peninsula, Kimberley, Western Australia* was published in 1996. The project and publication were awarded the 1996 Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation external medal for excellence in Australian research that benefits the nation.

Because of my interest in the Kimberley, I was a founding member of the Kimberley Society established in 1992. Based in Perth, the Society had a broad focus and brought together scientists, Kimberley residents, and Aboriginal communities to encourage research on and disseminate information about the remote region. The distribution of information was achieved through lectures, conferences, expeditions, and monthly meetings. I was a member of the executive committee from the Society's inception in 1992, the scientific editor of the Society's occasional publications, and served as the President from 1997-2000.

One of my most rewarding experiences has been my involvement with the Western Australian Gould League, a not-for-profit independent environmental organisation that educates people to understand, appreciate, and protect the environment. The Western Australian Gould League was formed in 1939 with Charles Hadley as its first President, who was, at the time, the Director of Education. Membership rose quickly, and over 18,000 school students became members by 1955. Today, the Western Australian Gould League maintains a strong relationship with Catholic, Independent, and Department of Education schools, with annually some 7,500 students experiencing its environmental education programmes.

Vincent Serventy was a founding member of the Western Australian Gould League. In 1951, he participated in the first annual Gould League School Camp at Bickley, located on the Darling Scarp alongside the picturesque Bickley Reservoir, twenty-five kilometres from Perth. The school camp was a grand experiment in taking fifty primary school children from across the state for a fortnight schooling in the bush to participate in hands-on-learning nature studies'. I was involved in the school camp from the early 1970s, often sharing duties with Kevn Griffiths, a teacher with Vincent on the first Bickley adventure. In the 1990s, the removal of Education Department funding saw the Bickley School Camp's demise, a great shame. It was educational, fun, and greatly appreciated by the students who attended. It was, at the time, the longest-running school camp of its kind in Australia.

Herdsmen Lake is the largest wetland in the inner metropolitan area located on the Swan Coastal Plain, six kilometres north-west of Perth and supports a diversity of wildlife. In 1984, the Herdsmen Lake Wildlife Centre, a purpose-built environmental education centre, funded by public donations coordinated by the World Wide Fund for Nature, was constructed on the lake's shores. The Indigenous program conducted at the Wildlife Centre, part-funded by Catholic Education, aims to provide a bridge of shared understanding between contemporary and traditional thinking about the importance of caring for our environment and using our natural resources responsibly. The teaching is achieved by engaging students in traditional Noongar practices such as storytelling and traditional art and language. The students are immersed in local Wadjuk Noongar culture under the direction of Noongar leaders.

During my career, I have imparted the lessons that I learnt from the Serventys. There is always a need for scientists to involve the community in natural history studies to conserve Australia's precious wildlife for future generations. I have had incredible support from my colleagues, friends, volunteers, and family in my life's journey. Furthermore, my wife, Doctor Irene Ioannakis, has provided the love, support, and encouragement that has allowed me to be the recipient of such a prestigious award.