

2020 Youth Conservation Award

The youth of Australia make significant contributions to the wildlife conservation movement through innovative projects and ideas. It is young people who can drive lasting and sustainable change, who will become the next ambassadors in wildlife 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 wildlife conservation by rewarding and recognising their efforts.

The award for 2020 was presented to eight-year-old Charlie Cairncross of Fingal Head, New South Wales.

Charlie has been a wildlife carer from the day he was born. He has grown up in a home that cares for macropods, birds, and other native marsupials such as possums and gliders. Charlie spends much time searching for native food sources to feed these animals, cleans enclosures, and advocates for their privacy, safety, and successful release. Although naturally shy, these skills and knowledge have helped Charlie find a sense of purpose and structure, bringing him much joy.

Charlie has been an active Junior Wild Defender at Green Heroes since the age of five. Charlie contributes to the creation of meaningful conservation projects that engage young children in wildlife conservation action. In response to the bushfires, Charlie's idea was to travel into heavily affected areas and link children to orphaned and injured wildlife affected by the bushfires. As a result, Charlie was able to help create the Wildlife Adoption Program and a short film that inspired children and schools in every state of Australia to sponsor orphaned wildlife. Of the funds raised, 100 percent of proceeds went directly to wildlife carers for medical supplies needed to care for orphaned wildlife.

Charlie has begun to engage in public speaking at school assemblies and community gatherings to share his ideas with other children. Since its launch in December 2019, Charlie's Wildlife Adoption Program has raised over \$10,000 for the care of orphaned native wildlife by preschool and primary school children across Australia. Before this, Charlie focused on native bee conservation by promoting native beehives and habitats in schools, preserving native tree hollows for hollow-dwelling native wildlife, and promoting wildlife-friendly gardens.

Charlie is dedicated to preserving and protecting native Australian wildlife and is currently working on a second project and short film to be released in a few months. To view the current project and short film, please visit www.greenheroes.org.au/adopt-a-joe

Acceptance Speech from Charlie Cairncross

Thank you to the Australian Wildlife Society for choosing me to receive this award and honouring the little people's power in Australian Conservation.

My mum and I have always rescued, rehabilitated, and released native wildlife at our home in northern New South Wales, but last summer, as bushfires damaged the land, we volunteered to travel to the south coast of New South Wales to provide additional assistance to small wildlife shelters such as Majors Creek Wombat Refuge.

I will never forget it. When we arrived, there were lots of little fires still burning all around us. We met the wildlife carers who had tears in their eyes, sadness in their voices, and too many animals to look after. We helped as much as we could, but I knew more help was needed. With my family and friends' help, I made a short film to send to preschools across Australia, asking children, just like me, to help by sponsoring a bushfire-affected animal. Over 4,000 children in 170 preschools across Australia fundraised to sponsor an animal. Together, we raised over \$13,000. That is a significant amount of money raised by three- and four-year-olds.

In some ways, I receive the honour of this award on behalf of those children. But as children, we want to do more. We may be small, but our hearts are big. We worry about what is happening to our world. We understand the difference between token gestures and a true call to action. The race to protect Australia's native wildlife is real, and when we are given a real opportunity to be part of it, children will rise to the occasion.

This year, I will continue to promote the Wildlife Adoption Program to help wildlife carers and native animals. I will also be working with Green Heroes to give children more opportunities to protect and preserve native wildlife – before they suffer, before they are injured, and before it is too late. We may not be able to save the world before bedtime, but together we can change the world.

I am Charlie, and I am eight-years-old. Thank you for giving me a voice. I look forward to working with you now and in the future for the benefit of Australia's precious wildlife.



Patrick Medway AM presenting eight-year-old Charlie Cairncross the 2020 Youth Conservation Award.