



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

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.

2019 Wildlife Rehabilitation Award

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Award is awarded to an individual or a conservation group that is contributing to the preservation of Australia's wildlife. The Society is aware that many organisations and thousands of volunteers are working tirelessly to save Australia's wildlife and the habitat in which they live. Many people find the experience of rehabilitating native wildlife rewarding; however, it is time-consuming and can be very expensive. The award is intended to acknowledge and commemorate, on behalf of the whole community, the individuals or conservation groups working tirelessly to support, rehabilitate and conserve Australia's native wildlife.

The award for 2019 was presented to John Creighton of Bundanoon, New South Wales. John cares for orphaned, injured and manged wombats and educates the community about the common wombat or bare-nosed wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*). In the field, John follows wombats and installs medicated burrow flaps. The wombats become treated for mange when they enter or leave their burrows. John is the founder of Wombat Care Bundanoon (WCB) and is dedicated to looking after wombat populations in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales.

John runs community workshops, attends conferences and manages volunteers. A group of 16 university

students, and their teacher, were inspired by John's work and flew over from California to volunteer their time at WCB. John has an in-depth understanding of the implications of mange for wombat populations on a broader ecological scale. John educates children about wombat care and biology at local schools. John also engages with and encourages the wider community to take action on all aspects of wombat conservation and hopes to preserve the Australian icon for future generations.

Acceptance speech from John Creighton

Thank you to the Australian Wildlife Society for presenting me with the Wildlife Rehabilitation Award for 2019. I am truly touched, humbled and honoured. To be the recipient of such an award is motivating, it is not an end-point, box-ticked, or goal-achieved. Receiving this award confirms that I am on the right path and encourages me to push forward. Personally, receiving this award marks a new chapter, in an ongoing journey, in wildlife care and community education.

Thank you to the Society for all you do to preserve Australia's wildlife and empower and educate so many individuals. The support, guidance, and knowledge the Society provides are vital for a successful outcome for Australia's wildlife. Simply, the Society empowers and inspires many individuals to achieve wildlife preservation, and for that, I am most grateful.

Each wildlife conservation organisation, in its unique way, is working together to achieve the same vision, intent, and action for Australia's wildlife. Personally, to be acknowledged for doing what I love, for those I love (the wombats), in their time of great need (mange, drought, and bushfires) is a powerful and affirming feeling. I am appreciative that my efforts have been recognised as valuable, vital and worthwhile. Thank you. Being the recipient of this prestigious award sends a message to other wildlife rehabilitators, that work in similar ways and achieving positive results for wildlife, that we are on the right path. Our work is noticed, and it matters!

When I think of the work wildlife rehabilitators do, I think of words such as sacrifice, dedication, commitment, challenge, struggle, and selflessness. Wildlife rehabilitation is hard work. It is physically and emotionally



President, Suzanne Medway AM, presenting the Wildlife Rehabilitation Award to John Creighton.

demanding, but it is also affirming, uniting and beautiful. As wildlife rehabilitators, we give so much of ourselves for the wildlife in our care, and as every good carer knows, wildlife rehabilitation demands nothing less than our very best.

Caring for and being in such a position to make a positive change in the lives of Australia's wildlife is a privilege. The more you give, the more you get out of it. Their successes become our successes and together, we and the wildlife in our care and in the wild, all move forward. We are so fortunate to have so many hard-working wildlife rehabilitators across Australia. The goals and accomplishments being achieved, nationwide, is inspiring.

Attending a Wombat Protection Society of Australia conference on mange in 2015 was a key turning point for Wombat Care Bundanoon. It was one of those points where a specific need dictated our work. My focus went from rescuing and rehabilitating wombats to treating wombats for mange. Over the years, Wombat Care Bundanoon treating wombats for mange has saved hundreds of wombats from pain, misery, and death. However, this work is far from over, and we have so much still to do.

Receiving the 2019 Wildlife Rehabilitation Award is a real personal milestone, a great honour, and a motivator. I would like to thank my family, my extended family, and my friends. Without their love and support, I would simply not be here

myself. To the Australian Wildlife Society, thank you for all you do. I will honour this award with great work in the future and do my best for Australia's wombats and wildlife. Thank you.

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.



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

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



Winners are grinners. John Creighton and Caitlin Gallagher.

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'!