

2021 Serventy Conservation Award

The prestigious Serventy Conservation Award was inaugurated in 1999 to commemorate the outstanding wildlife conservation work by the members of the Serventy family – Vincent Serventy, his brother Dr Dominic Serventy, and his sister Lucy Serventy. Each member of the Serventy family has given a lifetime of commitment to conserving Australia's wildlife. The award is intended to recognise and celebrate the wildlife conservation work not done as part of a professional career. It is awarded to 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 wildlife conservation skills through sheer hard work.

The award for 2021 was presented to Maureen Christie of Carpenter Rocks, South Australia.

Maureen has devoted herself to wildlife conservation work for more than twenty-seven years. Her accomplishments include initiating a plan to trap feral cats at known roost sites of the Critically Endangered orange-bellied parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*), being active in shorebird counts in south-east South Australia, helping to establish the Friends of Shorebirds SE, and she has been the Secretary/Treasurer of the Friends of Shorebirds SE since its inception. Maureen has coordinated regular monitoring of shorebird nesting sites and educated the public on the importance of keeping dogs on a leash, which led to the first successful hatching and fledging of the Vulnerable little tern (*Sterna albifrons*). She has also been responsible for shaping South Australia's fisheries policy to protect shorebirds adequately.

She is actively involved in shorebird research, including tracking migratory birds, which has led to over thirty-five scientific articles being published. Maureen has conducted many workshops for children and community groups. She has written about two hundred newsletters for distribution to public groups and has also been interviewed on ABC radio. Maureen has organised educational displays about shorebirds and their conservation at two museums. She has become widely accepted as a shorebird expert.

Maureen's contributions have significantly increased the scientific knowledge of the natural history of shorebirds in South Australia, which is crucial for the birds' conservation. She is a worthy winner of the 2021 Serventy Conservation Award for her lifelong contribution to wildlife conservation and education.

Acceptance Speech from Maureen Christie

The main focus of my volunteer work in recent years has been the protection of both migratory and resident shorebirds. Having received a copy of the Autumn 2021 edition of *Australian Wildlife*, featuring Robert Bush's stunning photograph of a bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) and a comprehensive article by David Edwards of the Queensland Wader Study Group, I know your members are well informed not only of the threats facing shorebirds but of the work that is being done throughout the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

There is much fear for the future of shorebirds – how they will cope with rising sea levels, continual land reclamation of shorebird habitat throughout the flyway (including Australia), and increased recreational and commercial use of our beaches. I want to share with you a 'good news' story from the south east of South Australia that came about as a result of the tens of thousands of volunteer hours that go into fieldwork, data analysis, and advocacy.

The most outstanding achievement of my life was when the Friends of Shorebirds SE (FoSSE) achieved a negotiated settlement, through the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, with the Federal Minister of the Environment, the South Australian Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, and Australian Kelp Products Pty Ltd. The tribunal led to the South Australian Beach-cast Marine Algae Fishery being reorganised. At conciliation, we were told that we were the only ones to bring science to the table. The Deputy President of the Tribunal turned to me before she made her ruling and asked if I thought the proposed compromise would adequately protect shorebirds and is evidence that the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 can protect threatened species when enforced by the Federal Government. If the matter had remained under state jurisdiction, the battle would have been lost before it had begun.

I am a member of the Victorian Wader Study Group, the Australasian Wader Studies Group, and, of course, the Friends of Shorebirds SE. Without the work of their members over the last forty years, we would not have had the data and would not have achieved this magnificent result. So, in accepting this award, I acknowledge the work of so many others. Thank you.



L to R: Maureen Christie, Dr Julie Old, and Patrick Medway AM.