



The youth of Australia make significant contributions to wildlife conservation through innovative projects and ideas. It is young people who can drive lasting and sustainable change, become the next ambassadors in wildlife conservation, and, hopefully, the successors of 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 2022 was presented to Talitha Huston from Gidjegannup, Western Australia.

Talitha wrote a bird book called *Birds of the Perth Hills*, complete with hand-painted maps, all her own photographs, her own 'skittish rating', and photography tips for each bird. The book was received well because there is no bird book for the Perth Hills. She sold 120 copies at the Blue Sky Festival launch in Mundaring, Western Australia, and, within one week, had sold two hundred copies. To date, Talitha has sold over 6,000 copies and donated the proceeds to a wildlife charity in her region. It is impressive that Talitha created the book while still at school, without her parents knowing she had been doing it for over two years.

Talitha has also made a short video on the birds of the Perth Hills and speaks to different groups, including school students, to inspire them to participate in the conservation of native wildlife – a remarkable achievement by a young conservationist worthy of recognition of the Society's Youth Conservation Award for 2022.

Acceptance Speech from Talitha Huston

Thank you so much for this award. When I was fourteen years old, walking around the bush and taking photos of birds, I did not expect to receive such recognition and an outstanding award.

I have always been interested in nature and photography. I received my first camera when I was three years old. Because I was home-schooled through primary school, I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time outside in nature, and I think that was a slight head-start. I took lots of photos and came up with the idea of creating a book. I thought, maybe this is how I can have an impact at this age. Living in the Perth Hills, you take it for granted, having all the birds around you, and it is easy to get used to it. But having the opportunity to get out in nature and take photos, I realised how special our biodiversity is. I started piecing together my book when I was fourteen years old, while still at school, and finished it when I was sixteen. Once the book was finished, I presented it to my parents and said, "Do you think this could be published?"

After going through the technical process, two hundred copies of *Birds of the Perth Hills* were printed, and after one week, they sold out. It was great knowing that people were interested in our local birdlife. Since then, I have sold over 6,000 copies. I wanted to do it correctly, so the book was printed on recycled paper using vegetable ink. I have also donated over \$4,500 to a local wildlife charity in Western Australia. The book has successfully been distributed to ninety-five shops and outlets around Perth and the south-west of Perth.

I have been privileged to conduct five radio interviews and twenty-five presentations to community groups and schools about the birds of Perth Hills, encouraging and motivating the community to get out there and follow their passions. Through these presentations, I have conveyed the importance of bird and environmental conservation to around 750 adults and children.

The environment is the most critical issue right now and will always be. I think it is easy to get overwhelmed knowing how to protect our environment. You can worry about many things. It is also easy to become complacent and not realise how beautiful and unique the birds and the Perth Hills environment are. I have always thought the environment should be our number one focus, and I am so grateful to be able to have an impact. I hope to get people to take more interest in the environment through my book and therefore want to conserve it.

Before enrolling in university, I wanted to see more of the world. I decided to take a year off and work along the east coast of Australia before travelling overseas for the last six months of the year. In 2024, I plan on studying film and the environment, with the dream of producing nature documentaries and hopefully becoming the next Sir David Attenborough. I am excited to see what the future holds.

Top: 2022 Youth Conservation Award. L to R: Dr Julie Old, Wayne Greenwood, and Talitha Huston.