

2023 Individual Youth Conservation Award

Australia's youth play a vital role in conserving Australian flora and fauna and can significantly contribute to wildlife conservation 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 Board of the Society. We aim to inspire young people to have a stake in wildlife conservation by rewarding and recognising their efforts.

The Individual Youth Conservation Award for 2023 was presented to **Matthew Brooker** of Whitwarta, South Australia.

Matthew took it upon himself to volunteer and conduct work experience at Kangaroo Rescue South Australia, where he assisted the team in caring for kangaroos and other wildlife. He also assisted with reintroducing endangered animals to support the survival of the land.

In addition, Matthew successfully secured a scholarship with Earthwatch Australia as part of their student challenge program. Living and working at Calperum Station, a reserve on the north side of the Murray River, South Australia, guided by Earthwatch scientists, Matthew conducted hands-on research surveying fauna and flora and monitoring carbon and water.

Matthew has also assisted with bird monitoring with Birdlife Australia, where he travelled to the Yorke Peninsula, South Australia, to monitor the nests of the endangered eastern hooded plover (*Thinornis cucullatus*).

Matthew has a keen interest in wildlife and land conservation and hopes to one day become an ecologist.

Acceptance Speech from Matthew Brooker

I was surprised to be nominated for the Youth Conservation Award and even more shocked when I won! I have always loved animals, and we have always had dogs as pets at home. We currently have two rescue German Shepherds.

When it came to seeking work experience for school, I knew I was interested in animals but that being a veterinarian was not for me. So, I expanded my search and came across Kangaroo Rescue South Australia.

The week I spent at Kangaroo Rescue South Australia was an eye-opener. Not only was it work involving animals, but they also taught me how important native flora is for the care and future of

our native animals. No one thinks twice about pulling up weeds or plants where they live, not considering that the weed or plant might contribute to a native animal's existence.

So, when an opportunity came up for the Earthwatch Fellowship to spend a week with scientists learning about conservation, I thought I would try that, as by now, I knew I wanted a future that involved either animals or conservation. I thought this experience might help me decide which direction to take.

I also joined a volunteer program with BirdLife Australia to help monitor the hooded plover, an endangered species on the Yorke Peninsula, South Australia.

The species is dwindling due to being shorebirds and how Australians flock to the beach in the warmer months, their breeding season. Humans, dogs, and cars on the beach destroy the bird's nests and eggs.

All these experiences have led me to want to work in the field of environment and conservation. This year, I am concentrating on my Year 12 studies so I can hopefully get into university to study Environmental Science, as that is where I want to work in the future in some capacity.

Thank you, and I feel honoured to receive this award.



2023 Youth Conservation Award Recipient (Individual). Caitlin Gallagher presenting Matthew Brooker with the Youth Conservation Award.



Matthew Brooker installing a pitfall trap.



Matthew Brooker presenting his acceptance speech.