



Impact Report 2024



Australian Wildlife
Conservancy field ecologist
Aliesha Dodson holds one of
Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary's
newest bilby residents.



Aussie Ark runs a captive breeding program for squirrel gliders.



Australian Geographic Society

In 2024, the Society introduced new funding programs to address increasingly urgent threats to the natural environment.

THE AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY (hereafter “the Society”) is a not-for-profit that supports Australian individuals and organisations who lead the way in nature conservation, scientific research and public education aimed at positive environmental outcomes. It also encourages the advancement of human knowledge through exploration.

It’s the Society’s vision to foster a community of well-informed, passionate Australians who are committed to finding solutions to the multiple threats facing our natural world.

In 2024 we pursued our mission and vision through a series of programs, each working to engage the public in environmental issues, raise public funds for species at risk and direct funds into programs designed for maximum impact across a range of urgent threats.

The Society also continued to recognise excellence and achievement in adventure and exploration.

The work of the Society was expertly communicated throughout the Australian Geographic storytelling ecosystem including the magazine, books, online, live events and through strategic partnerships with external organisations within the not-for-profit and commercial sectors.

In 2024, the Society rebranded its bimonthly public fundraising campaigns as ‘Australia’s Most Endangered’ and entered a one-year partnership with Australian Wildlife Conservancy as the exclusive recipients of funds raised via that channel. It also introduced a new funding program called Australian Geographic Awards for Nature.

It suspended the old adventure funding model pending a new one for 2025 but continued to support past recipients via valuable media exposure and live events. It also handed out merit awards, the Australian Geographic Adventurer of the Year Awards, to the best of the best at the end of 2024.

2024 FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

In the 12 months to December 2024, the Australian Geographic Society disbursed more than **\$426,490** in direct funding to conservation.

In 2024 The Australian Geographic Society received donations totalling:

\$341,666

NEWS

In December 2024 the Society launched its own dedicated website: australiangeographicsociety.org

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Welcome to the 2024 Impact Report

Our first ever impact report will provide an overview of the Society's activities, and details on funds raised and disbursed.



FURTHER TO THE overarching mission and vision of the Society, it specifically provides financial and practical support to individuals and organisations who lead the way in nature conservation, scientific research and public education aimed at positive environmental outcomes and the advancement of knowledge of our environment.

The Society also offers expert storytelling through the pages of the respected AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC magazine and the many digital channels available to us as a leading Australian independent media organisation.

The Australian Geographic Society's members are the tens of thousands of subscribers to the magazine, which will celebrate its 40th birthday in 2026. Some of those subscribers have been with us since our first issue.

Keeping our loyal members and all our donors and supporters informed about how the Society uses donated funds is crucial. We will continue to communicate the impact of the funds which are donated directly by the public or generated through the activities of the Australian Geographic brand.

In 2025, the Society is publishing a standalone Impact Report for the first time with the intention of publishing a report annually after the end of each calendar year and making it publicly available to download through the Society's own dedicated website.

In this report we will provide details of all our areas of activity and the ways they help us move forward in our mission. That mission is to provide financial and practical help to courageous changemakers working to solve the urgent issues facing our natural world, and also those keeping the great Aussie spirit of adventure alive.

Chrissie Goldrick
Chair, Australian Geographic Society

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Students participate in the B&B Highway biodiversity program.





AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC AWARDS FOR NATURE



A brand-new funding channel aims to put vital funds into the hands of courageous, hard working and innovative changemakers.

IN 2024, THE Society introduced a new flagship funding program, the Australian Geographic Awards for Nature. Previously to this, funding was intentionally focused into lots of small seed-type grants (less than \$5000) that went mainly to research within academic institutions. The Society has now pivoted that model towards one with fewer grants but of greater cash value. In this first year it awarded three grants – to be known as ‘awards’ – from a total funding pool of \$100,000. We launched a competitive two-step application process in February 2024, defining clear eligibility criteria.

The awards are aimed at powering courageous changemakers tackling the many environmental crises that face our natural world. These threats include impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, feral invasive species, pollution and habitat degradation among others.

Often, local solutions to protect a native animal, restore a polluted waterway or transform a degraded landscape can help foster public support and, ultimately, assist in addressing more substantial and intricate challenges posed by climate change, crashing biodiversity and ultimately the pursuit of environmental justice.

The Awards for Nature called for scientifically informed, community-led projects that collected and used data, collaborated with local communities including First Nations consultation and involvement, and could prove they knew how to manage funds.

An expert review panel made up of friends and colleagues of the Society from the research and conservation sector including Dr John Wamsley OAM, Dr Tony Friend along with Rachel Lowry of Bush Heritage, among others, was assembled to review the applications.

We made the application process as streamlined and simple as we could to avoid taking up too much of our hardworking conservationists’ precious time,

while still pursuing a fair and robust application and review process.

Sixty-five one-page Expressions of Interest (EOIs) were received from which 16 projects were invited to apply in full.

The full applications included a wide variety of worthy projects. There were conservation efforts for individual endangered reptile and frog species. There were projects aimed at encouraging farmers to connect biodiverse corridors across farmland to help small bird species move through the landscape. There were Miyawaki (tiny) forests, private individual conservation efforts on old pastoral properties, and much more.

There were many excellent projects among them, but the Society arrived at its final winners as, when viewed together, they tackled three key issues of our times: the effects of climate change, marine pollution and biodiversity loss. Each winning project is capably led by people of passion who also know how to collect and use data. They all employ evidence-based methods, up-to-date science, education of emerging generations and First Nations knowledge, and all have galvanised broad community interest and support.

The Society is thrilled with the calibre and quality of the winning projects and that of their leadership teams in the program’s first year of operation.

The winners received their award funds and a trophy in a public ceremony at the Art Gallery of New South Wales on 17 October 2024 attended by more than 200 guests including special guest Rachel Ward AM, who made the presentations. The projects will be required to report regularly on the acquittal of the funds for a period of up to three years.

In 2025, the Society is thrilled to be able to offer \$150,000 across five individual awards.

Right: A coral holding tank at Forever Reef in Port Douglas.
Below: L-R, the late John Rumney, Dr Charlie Veron and Dr Dean Miller.



“Corals are the perfect organism to keep in a living biobank as they effectively live forever under the correct conditions.”

Dr Dean Miller, CEO, GBR Legacy and the Forever Reef Project

GOLD TIER AWARD / \$50,000

Forever Reef Project

Leader: Dr Dean Miller



The Forever Reef project is an initiative of the reef charity Great Barrier Reef Legacy of which marine biologist Dr Dean Miller is CEO. Its mission is to collect samples of all 415 known coral species and preserve them in a living coral biobank, or ark, as insurance against the loss of corals due to various factors.

The ark currently holds 200 species, so a further 215 need to be collected and it’s likely some will go extinct before they can be harvested. The \$50,000 Awards for Nature funding will be used to finance a major coral-collecting voyage to the northern outer Great Barrier Reef, which has been severely bleached in recent times. A further 50 species are expected to be added to the ark from that expedition, which Dean hopes will embark in late 2025.

Working with the ‘godfather’ of coral, Dr Charlie Veron, Forever Reef aims to keep all 415 coral

species alive in a state-of-the-art facility on the wharf at Port Douglas. Ultimately it’s for their conservation, but also to make live fragments, tissue samples, and genetic material available to aid in other reef research and restoration efforts.

“Corals are the perfect organism to keep in a living biobank as they effectively live forever under the correct conditions,” Dean says. “In our facility we don’t just provide but also carefully control the conditions so our corals will thrive.”

In the launch year of the Awards for Nature we believe a project designed to address the survival of the reef presents a symbolic opportunity. That opportunity is to launch the program with a long-term, sustainable project that addresses the key issue of climate change, is situated on our most iconic natural feature, is unique, is a world-first initiative, and is housed in a facility open to the general public.



SILVER TIER / \$30,000

Australian Marine Debris Initiative, Tangaroa Blue Foundation

Leader: Heidi Tait

The Australian Marine Debris Initiative (AMD) is a network of volunteers, communities and organisations who contribute data to an online hub that records detailed information about marine debris collected during clean-ups. Armed with this knowledge, they work towards solutions to identify the origins of various types of litter. The AMDI Database is the largest database of marine debris in the Southern Hemisphere with more than 27 million litter items recorded at more than 4700 clean-up sites since 2004. It has contributed to 350 source reduction plans that aim to stem the flow of marine debris at its source.

“AMD helps communities look after their own coastal environments by providing resources and support programs,” says Tangaroa Blue Foundation co-founder Heidi Tait. “We collaborate with industry and government to create change on a large scale. Ocean health is under siege from marine debris and a coordinated response is often missing, resulting in duplication of effort between organisations and inefficient use of resources.”

Tangaroa Blue addresses this gap by utilising AMDI data to produce data-driven research that can initiate clean-ups and source reduction programs, inform public campaigns and ultimately influence public policy. The whole cycle harnesses people power, transforming them into citizen scientists who are heavily invested in the outcomes of their efforts as they collect and record information locally and add it to the global database.

Tangaroa Blue has plans to roll out AMDI workshops across every state and territory. These will upskill participants to implement the AMDI Framework in their local community, starting with clean-ups and recording of resulting debris. The silver tier Australian Geographic Award for Nature of \$30,000 will contribute towards running four workshops across four states in localities where they have yet to initiate programs.



BRONZE TIER

B&B Highway

Leader: Dr Judy Friedlander

Pollinators are crucial to ecosystems and agriculture. Bees, birds, bats, butterflies, beetles and even some reptiles play essential roles in plant reproduction. Many native plants rely on specific pollinators for pollen transfer and seed dispersal, forming the foundation of ecosystems like forests and woodlands.

In agriculture, pollinators are indispensable. Bees significantly enhance crop yields and contribute to Australia's economy.

The B&B Highway initiative – Bed and Breakfasts for Birds, Bees and Biodiversity – has been deployed in urban locations in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne identified as lacking corridors for important plants and pollinators. By creating regenerative pollinator corridors, plantings and habitat implementations within schools, the initiative also teaches important biodiversity knowledge and skills to students.

“We know cities are biodiversity hotspots, so what we do within cities matters, and it makes sense because in Australia most of us live in urban areas,” says Dr Judy Friedlander, creator of the B&B Highway initiative.

Since its inception, B&B Highway has delivered its program at 200 sites. At schools, it introduces students to locally native flora and fauna species and teaches them about the role of pollinators and the methods



used by each species to transfer pollen and disperse seeds. “Then we head outside and do a biodiversity hunt,” Judy says. “The kids get really excited. We give them each a plant to put into the ground. It gives them a real sense of ownership.

“The third part is data collection, and that’s super important. They go out and take photos and make observations, which are uploaded to iNaturalist and the Atlas of Living Australia through various smart devices. And then we share inspirational stories of how children have actually discovered new species!”

The program also includes creating artificial habitats and homes, which can include installing nesting boxes or stingless bee hives. Students also learn about the sheer variety of bees (more than 2000 species) in Australia and how many of the solitary species lay eggs on the open ground. Urban development and the spread of concrete surfaces is driving these ground dwellers to the brink.

The \$20,000 bronze tier award will enable the B&B Highway program to be rolled out into five new schools across Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.



Top: Flying foxes are key pollinators. **Below:** Students take part in the B&B Highway.





Australia's Most Endangered

In 2024, our bimonthly fundraisers were rebranded to reflect the urgency of the need to find solutions to our crashing biodiversity.

EVERY TWO MONTHS, to align with the publication of the bimonthly AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC magazine, the Society runs a public fundraising campaign to assist in the conservation of individual at-risk native wildlife species. These campaigns run in the pages of the magazine and online. They are amplified through the physical bookstores of Australian Geographic's retail partner, QBD Books, where revenue from recycled paper bags is contributed by QBD to the Society, which in turn allocates a proportion of those funds to the campaign totals.

In 2024, the bimonthly campaigns were rebranded 'Australia's Most Endangered' to give it a clear identity and differentiate it from other Society-led programs. It also helps lend a sense of urgency to these often-desperate efforts to bring native animals back from the brink of extinction.

Also new was the establishment of annual partnerships with single beneficiary organisations. The inaugural partner was Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC). The benefits of partnering with large multi-species organisations like AWC include administration efficiencies and the chance to establish enduring relationships.

We were able to promote subscriptions to the AWC community resulting in 72 new subscribers. The quality content provided by AWC helped AG craft compelling fundraisers, which in turn provided them with valuable exposure to AG's large audiences.

The first Australia's Most Endangered-branded fundraiser was for the greater bilby in the March/April period. In addition to the usual fundraising communications, we also sold \$2 temporary bilby tattoos via QBD bookstores, which elevated the result substantially with a final figure of **\$23,454.07** to kickstart a good year of fundraising.

SNAPSHOT 2024

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2024
Golden-shouldered parrot
(*Psephotus chrysopterygius*)
\$14,734.86

MARCH/APRIL 2024
Greater bilby
(*Macrotis lagotis*)
\$23,454.07

MAY/JUNE 2024
Numbat
(*Myrmecobius fasciatus*)
\$11,289.70

JULY/AUGUST 2024
Western quoll or chuditch
(*Dasyurus geoffroii*)
\$10,298.17

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2024
Gouldian finch
(*Erythrura gouldiae*)
\$11,850.40

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2024
Northern hairy-nosed wombat
(*Lasiorhinus krefftii*)
\$12,552.09

** March/April 2024 was the first branded 'Australia's Most Endangered'*

“Bilbies are one of our iconic species. Once common across much of Australia, like many species, they have been in decline. However, the partnership between AWC and the Australian Geographic Society, and critically, your support, is making a measurable impact. Together, we are restoring bilby populations across the country and educating a new generation about their importance.”

Tim Allard, CEO, Australian Wildlife Conservancy





Bimonthly fundraisers

Previous public fundraising campaigns continued to deliver long-term impact for beneficiary organisations.

Aussie Ark

MAY/JUNE 2023

Aussie Ark's green and golden bell frog (*Litoria aurea*) captive breeding program is successfully breeding a chytrid-fungus-free population of these beautiful, endangered amphibians. Based at their specialist facilities at Conservation Ark in the Australian Reptile Park in Gosford, north of Sydney, Aussie Ark works with researchers at Macquarie University to further understand how to protect this species and other endangered frogs from this key threat. Thanks to support from the Australian Geographic Society's bimonthly public fundraising campaign (May-June 2022), which raised **\$12,609.71**, they now hope to return good and healthy numbers of chytrid-free frogs to the wild.

Aussie Ark also benefits from funds raised through the iconic Australian Geographic Art Calendar. Each year, since 2019, \$2 from each calendar sale goes directly to Aussie Ark. Wildlife artist James Hough donates the use of his art for free. In 2024, the Society donated **\$11,500** to Aussie Ark from sales of the art calendar.



IMAGE CREDIT: ESTHER BEATON/AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC



Left: Linda Sparrow.
Below: Dr Bree Talbot
at the Byron Bay
Wildlife Hospital.

“Every tree we plant not only brings us closer to our 500,000 goal, but it’s also another link in the wildlife corridor we’re creating to join existing patches of koala habitat together.”

Linda Sparrow, President, Bangalow Koalas



Bangalow Koalas

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023

In November/December 2023, the Society raised **\$10,493.68** funds for Bangalow Koalas and, a year later, the NSW-based community group had used the donations it received to move closer to a monumental milestone.

Since 2019, Bangalow Koalas has been on a mission to get 500,000 ‘trees for hope’ in the ground by the end of 2025. This is in response to the fact that, without action, east coast koalas are at risk of disappearing. To date, the funds raised by the generous donations of AG readers have helped plant more than 12,000 trees across six different sites in northern New South Wales. Significantly, one of these trees marked Bangalow Koalas’ 400,000th tree planting milestone in September 2024.

“Habitat saves koalas, and planting trees creates habitat,” says Linda Sparrow, president of Bangalow Koalas and Australian Geographic Society’s 2022 Conservationist of the Year. “We are so grateful to everyone who donated to the Society’s fundraiser, as every tree we plant not only brings us closer to our 500,000 goal, but it’s also another link in the wildlife corridor we’re creating to join existing patches of koala habitat together.”

Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital

MAY/JUNE 2022

Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital (BBWH) is a fully licensed veterinary hospital dedicated to providing expert veterinary care for injured, sick and orphaned native Australian animals. Operating from a custom-built semi-trailer means the hospital can be rushed to the site of an emergency such as a bushfire, flood or mass stranding to provide life-saving triage, treatment, surgery and ongoing care for impacted wildlife.

Thanks to the Society’s fundraiser during May/June 2022, BBWH was able to apply over **\$5227** in funds towards providing expert treatment, surgery and care for endangered species including koalas and green turtles found in the biodiverse North Coast region of NSW.

Based on BBWH’s financial and veterinary practice records, the triage, assessment, supportive care and diagnostics required for an individual wildlife patient is approximately \$555, excluding the cost of surgery for complicated procedures. The Society’s funding means that 10 wildlife patients received the quality care they needed and have the best chance of being returned to the wild. When populations of many endangered species are perilously low, saving 10 individual native animals matters.

The Burramys Project

JAN-MAR 2010 AND JAN-FEB 2023

Back in 2010, the Society raised more than **\$130,000** to support conservation efforts for the mountain pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvus*, pictured below). This helped establish a breeding facility at Secret Creek Sanctuary near Lithgow, NSW, which aimed to bolster the population of this critically endangered species. The total cost of the captive breeding program was projected to exceed one million dollars, necessitating ongoing fundraising and support from various organisations and the public. The Society played a significant role in advancing these conservation initiatives.

Today, the breeding program is thriving, producing new young and offering hope for the species' future. The Burramys Project is a groundbreaking conservation effort inspired by the possum's survival through 25 million years of climatic changes. The Society's ongoing support (a further **\$13,227.35** was donated in 2023) has been instrumental in this success. With research students now focused on the project, the program is a promising model for saving critically endangered species in a warming world.



The Platy Project

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) led the 2023 Platy Project with UNSW platypus experts and the support of the Society. This month-long initiative engaged 8000 participants and 88 partners, hosting nationwide platypus-spotting events. More than 1000 platypuses were sighted, providing critical data to address knowledge gaps about this iconic species threatened by habitat loss, bushfires, drought and pollution. The project empowers communities to support conservation through citizen science. The Platy Project plays a critical role in protecting platypuses and their habitats, ensuring future generations will continue to enjoy these unique creatures.

Jess Abrahams, national nature campaigner at ACF, says that support from the Australian Geographic Society enabled this crucial project in collaboration with UNSW.

"Thanks to the Australian Geographic Society for supporting ACF's Platy Project and helping researchers understand more about this elusive animal and how we can better protect it," Jess says.

The Society donated **\$12,508.84** to the 2023 Platy Project.



Sponsorships

The Society's old sponsorship program of grants for adventure and conservation was still seeing funds utilised throughout 2023-24.

Australian National University Solar Racing Team

OCTOBER 2023

THE SOCIETY-SPONSORED Australian National University (ANU) Solar Racing Team embarked on a groundbreaking journey across Australia in September 2023, driving their solar-powered car from Canberra to Darwin and then competing in the renowned Bridgestone World Solar Challenge. Their route along the Stuart Highway traversed diverse ecosystems, highlighting the importance of environmental stewardship and sustainable innovation.

Competing in the Challenger Class, the ANU team faced stringent regulations, allowing only one battery charge in Darwin before the race began. Despite technical setbacks, harsh weather and punctures, they demonstrated resilience and teamwork. Mid-race, they transitioned to the Adventurer Class, enabling additional charges to ensure they reached Adelaide within the seven-day timeframe. In South Australia, they completed the journey entirely on solar power, showcasing their commitment to renewable energy.

The team's achievements surpassed all previous ANU Solar Racing records. Their success was supported by a **\$3000** Society grant.



IMAGE CREDIT: THOMAS WIELECKI/AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC



Special projects

Beyond its regular annual programs, the Society runs extra activities and projects that align with its mission and strategy.

takayna | Tarkine: One of the last wild places on earth

In 2024, the Society undertook the production and publication of a book about the Tarkine, or takayna, region of Tasmania. The 224pp book presents a powerful argument for World Heritage Listing of takayna. The project was managed and edited by Chrissie Goldrick, chair of the Society and former editor in chief of AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC.

The contributors include Tasmanian naturalist Dr Sally Bryant AM, Palawa academic Therese Sainty and leading environmentalist Dr Bob Brown. It showcases the work of many of Tasmania's finest wilderness photographers including Matthew Newton.

The book was described by Charles Woolley in *The Australian* thus: "If a book can save the world (or at least one remnant corner of it), it might be Australian Geographic's latest offering, a richly illustrated hardcover publication which cries out for the Tarkine's preservation from mining and forestry and the indifference of governments."

View towards Phantom Peak in the Arthur River region of takayna.

IMAGE CREDIT: ROB BLAKERS

The Forktree Project

ONGOING

The Forktree Project's goal is to return a degraded 54ha former pastoral property in South Australia's Fleurieu Peninsula back to nature.

This involves re-establishing tens of thousands of native trees and shrubs on the property, which will in turn bring back native animals, insects and birds as well as sequester tens of thousands of tonnes of carbon.

It was established in 2019 by Tim Jarvis AM. Tim is an environmental scientist, author, filmmaker, adventurer and public speaker. He is committed to finding pragmatic solutions to major environmental issues related to climate change and biodiversity loss. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to environment, community and exploration in 2010 and was the Society's Adventurer of the Year in 2012 and Conservationist of the Year in 2016. He is a member of the Society's Advisory Committee.

Forktree has two levels of impact.

The first is the practical work being done on the ground, which includes restoring Forktree to the way it was prior to 19th-century clearance for pastoral use. This involves planting native flora and encouraging natural regeneration. Over time Forktree will provide valuable habitat for native fauna as well as sequestering tens of thousands of tonnes of CO₂. The old shed is being converted into an interpretive centre to provide sustainability education. A seed nursery is under development to grow locally native plants, particularly those impacted by bushfires.

The second is about becoming a model for how smaller land holdings can make a meaningful contribution to climate change and biodiversity loss. (Small/medium-sized farms constitute nearly 10 per cent of Australia's agricultural land, covering tens of millions of hectares.) The Australian Geographic Society raises funds specifically for the Forktree Project.

Since 2020, the Society has raised **\$281,792** on behalf of the project.



“Over time, Forktree will provide valuable habitat for native fauna as well as sequestering tens of thousands of tonnes of CO₂.”

Tim Jarvis AM, Founder, Forktree Project

Above: Forktree on the Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia.

Below: Tim Jarvis in the plant nursery.





Adventure and exploration sponsorships

Australian Geographic Society encourages a spirit of adventure to foster a deeper connection with Australia's unique landscapes, wildlife and cultural heritage.

ADVENTURE PROMOTES EXPLORATION, curiosity, and an appreciation of the natural world, aligning with our broader mission to celebrate and protect Australia's diverse environments.

By inspiring people to step outside their comfort zones and engage with nature, the Society helps cultivate environmental awareness and a sense of responsibility and stewardship for Australia's remarkable ecosystems.

Since 1986, the Society has sponsored thousands of Australian adventurers undertaking often risky expeditions around Australia and the world.

It has also honoured the best in its annual awards for adventure, which are the longest running and most prestigious in Australia. These lauded adventurers exemplify the spirit of exploration and resilience the Society aims to promote and support through its sponsorships and awards programs.

NEWS

The sponsorship program was suspended in 2024 pending the introduction of a potential new model of funding in 2025 that aims to attract external funding partners. However, funds disbursed over previous years were still helping sponsored adventurers reach their goals, and we kept tabs on their progress throughout the year. Among them is Lucy Barnard who is walking the length of the world from south to north via the Americas. Others mentioned here either completed their tasks in 2024 or are still underway.



Lucy Barnard

Lucy Barnard is undertaking a historic journey to become the first woman to walk the length of the earth, from the tip of South America to the northernmost point of Alaska. Her 30,000km journey across 15 countries began in 2017. On 3 March 2023, she became the first woman to walk the length of South America. Lucy was awarded the Society's Nancy Bird Walton \$5000 grant for women adventurers in 2019 and 2022, and received a further \$5000 grant in 2024.

Throughout her journey, Lucy has overcome tough challenges like extreme weather conditions, diverse terrains and logistical obstacles. She has also been accompanied by her dog Wombat, whose presence has provided security and companionship.

In recognition of her remarkable achievements, Lucy was honoured as the Society's Adventurer of the Year in 2024.

Her journey not only exemplifies human endurance and resilience but also fosters cross-cultural connections and encourages others, especially women, to pursue their own adventures.



Project Zero

Project Zero is a pioneering, carbon-neutral expedition led by polar explorer Dr Geoff Wilson AM and his son Kitalé Wilson. Spanning two years and seven legs, the journey aims to traverse the world's most isolated and vulnerable environments, from Antarctica to the Arctic, to document the visible impacts of climate change.

By adopting a net-zero approach, the expedition seeks to inspire a new era of sustainable exploration. The Wilsons and their crew are journeying aboard *Nanook X*, an upcycled, carbon-neutral vessel powered by wind and solar energy. Throughout the expedition, they will document the effects of climate change on these fragile landscapes.



Michael Smith

In April 2024, aviator Michael Smith, the 2016 Adventurer of the Year, embarked on a commemorative flight to retrace the first aerial circumnavigation of Australia in 1924. Piloting *Southern Sun*, he flew from Point Cook near Melbourne, mirroring the original anticlockwise route around Australia's coastline.

Over 44 days, he navigated many challenges, paying homage to the pioneering efforts of Goble and McIntyre, who made the 1924 flight in a Fairey Mk III D seaplane.

Michael's journey celebrated a significant milestone in Australian aviation history and highlighted advancements in aviation technology and the enduring spirit of exploration.

Above: Michael Smith in *Southern Sun*.

Top left: Lucy Barnard and Wombat.

Top right: Geoff Wilson at the helm of *Nanook X*.



Lisa Blair OAM

In 2024, Australian sailor and twice winner of the Society’s Adventurer of the Year award Lisa Blair achieved significant milestones in solo yachting, further solidifying her status as a leading figure in the sailing community.

In April, she set a new world record by becoming the first female, and the fastest person, to sail a monohull solo, non-stop, and unassisted from Sydney to Auckland. She completed the voyage in eight days, three hours, and 19 minutes aboard her yacht, *Climate Action Now*. This achievement was part of her ‘Cross the Ditch for Climate Action Now’ campaign, aimed at raising awareness of ocean pollution and advocating for environmental sustainability.

Following that, Lisa embarked on a solo, unassisted circumnavigation of New Zealand. She sailed anticlockwise around the country, covering a distance of approximately 2672 nautical miles. She completed the journey in 16 days and 23 hours, setting a new monohull solo sailing record for the Auckland-to-Auckland route.



Sea to Summit 2024-25

James McAlloon successfully summited Antarctica’s Mt Vinson on a clear 6 January morning this year alongside Irish mountaineer Rob Smith.

Society-sponsored James spent three years preparing for his Sea to Summit expedition, including a training stint on the Greenland ice sheet. His Antarctic feat began at the Ronne Ice Shelf, skiing across heavily crevassed glaciers before reaching the Vinson Massif. The pair roped themselves and their sleds together for safety, averaging 24–30km per day. At 4892m, Mt Vinson is Antarctica’s highest peak and the last of the ‘Seven Summits’ for many climbers.

James collected climate and weather data across largely unstudied regions of Antarctica to enhance understanding of its changing climate and the global implications. The expedition lasted 18 days, covering 230km across nine glaciers and two mountain ranges.

Alexander Campbell

Alexander Campbell embarked on a four-year journey to circumnavigate the globe on foot, beginning in his hometown, Sydney, on 12 February 2023. His dual objectives are to complete a 40,000km trek across 30 countries and raise funds for The Fred Hollows Foundation.

The initial segment of Alex’s journey involved traversing Australia. Over 170 days, he covered 6320km, marking a significant milestone in his global expedition.

As of his 750th day on the road, Alex had raised more than \$94,000 for The Fred Hollows Foundation to support the organisation’s mission to restore sight to those affected by avoidable blindness.



Above: Alexander Campbell
Top left: Lisa Blair aboard *Climate Action Now*.
Top right: James McAlloon and Rob Smith.



AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC ADVENTURER OF THE YEAR



Australian Geographic Society's prestigious adventure awards were first presented in 1987 and are the longest running awards of their kind.

THIS YEAR WAS the second in which the traditional big gala awards event dinner was replaced with a media announcement and a series of smaller speaker events around the country showcasing high-achieving adventurers.

The level of staff resources and funds required by the production of the annual gala event was no longer sustainable. The Society has refocused its energies on the natural environment and ensuring that all efforts are directed towards these organisational goals. Smaller live events have a more affordable ticket price and allow us to connect more readily with our community. More about them in the next section.

In 2024 we rebranded the awards as the Australian Geographic Adventurer of the Year Awards. The conservation awards have been taken out as they have now evolved into the new Australian Geographic Awards for Nature.

THE CATEGORIES

YOUNG ADVENTURER OF THE YEAR

Awarded to a person usually under the age of 30, this award usually reflects a particular expedition or adventure during the last 24 months.

SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

This is awarded to those whose efforts reflect strength, determination and the ability to overcome obstacles to attain their goals and achieve great things. It also acknowledges that sometimes it takes more than one attempt to achieve those goals. There is no age limit. It usually reflects an achievement or attempt during the last 24 months. It's possible for there to be more than one winner in any given year.

ADVENTURER OF THE YEAR

This award has been won by Australia's most celebrated explorers and adventurers such as Lisa Blair OAM, Tim Jarvis AM and aviator Michael Smith. It usually reflects a particularly notable achievement in the last 24 months. There are no age limits.

LIFETIME OF ADVENTURE AWARD

This is the Society's highest honour and recognises those special Australians who haven't just lived an adventurous life, but have given back to Australia and inspired others by their leadership and example. It's customary for the Lifetime of Adventure to be awarded to an older Australian.

ADVENTURER OF THE YEAR

Lucy Barnard

Lucy Barnard is walking her way into history, aiming to become the first woman to traverse the length of the Americas solo, from Ushuaia, Argentina, to Utqiagvik, Alaska (see page 19).

While Lucy doesn't actively pursue awards, her achievements are piling up. As Adventurer of the Year, she joins an illustrious list of Australia's top adventurers. Wombat, her canine companion, also receives recognition for his endurance and unwavering support, marking the first time the Australian Geographic Society awards have honoured an animal.

Lucy's journey is far from over, but her courage, resilience, and connection to the world around her ensure her place among Australia's most inspiring adventurers.

A big congratulations to Lucy and Wombat!



Above: Lucy and Wombat on the trail in Mexico.

IMAGE CREDIT: SOFIA NAVARRETE ZUR

LIFETIME OF ADVENTURE

Michael Dillon AM

Over seven decades Mike has documented landmark expeditions, including Australia's first Everest summit in 1984. In 2024, he received the Society's Lifetime of Adventure medal.

Inspired by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's 1953 Everest climb, Mike developed his adventurous spirit through the Scouting movement in Sydney. In 1963, he became the first Australian awarded the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award. He received the award from Prince Philip himself.

His filmmaking career began unexpectedly in 1969 when, on a Himalayan trek, he took over a 16mm camera after the lead cameraman was injured. Two years later, his film *A Himalayan Journey* sold to the BBC, launching his career. He later joined Sir Edmund Hillary's 1977 Ganges expedition, marking the start of a lasting friendship. Mike also documented Hillary's humanitarian work in Nepal, where he built schools and hospitals. In 2002, Mike co-founded the Australian Himalayan Foundation to combat poverty in the region.

His work celebrates unsung heroes, including filming Tim Macartney-Snape's Sea to Summit Everest climb (1990) and Tim Cope's horseback journey across Mongolia. During COVID, he completed *The Great White Whale*, a documentary on Warwick Deacock's 1965 Big Ben climb. Combining original and modern footage, the film has won acclaim for its humour and adventure.



Above: Mike Dillon at home in country Victoria with his first film camera.

Below: As a young cameraman in the 1970s.





YOUNG ADVENTURER OF THE YEAR

Tom Robinson

Tom Robinson's dream of rowing solo across the Pacific ended unexpectedly in October 2023, but his extraordinary adventure still captured hearts worldwide and earned him a Guinness world record.

The then 23-year-old Australian set out in July 2022 from Peru in *Maiwar*, a 7m wooden rowing boat he designed and built himself, aiming to become the youngest person to row the Pacific.

After 15 months and 5000 nautical miles, Tom was just 50 days from reaching Australia when disaster struck. A freak wave capsized his boat near Vanuatu, leaving him clinging to its upturned hull for 14 hours before being rescued by a cruise ship – a dramatic moment that earned him the nickname “naked rower.”

Tom's journey began with a gruelling first leg, a 160-day solo traverse of the Pacific's most remote stretch. Blown off course from his original destination in the Marquesas Islands, he eventually reached Penrhyn, an atoll in the Cook Islands, surviving on limited rations, caught fish and desalinated water. His record-breaking feat earned him a place in the *Guinness World Records* as the youngest person to row solo across the Pacific Ocean.

He spent the following months exploring South Pacific islands, connecting with communities deeply tied to the sea. “There's a simplicity in the way Pacific islanders live that's so beautiful,” he reflects.

Tom embraced solitude during the journey, often rowing 10-12 hours daily in challenging conditions. Tom's spirit of resilience and curiosity places him among Australia's celebrated young adventurers, including Jessica Watson and Tim Cope. His remarkable story reminds us that the greatest adventures are about embracing the unexpected and finding meaning in the journey itself.



SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

Steph Devery

Paramedic Steph Devery cycled solo across 40 countries.

Burnt out from working on London's COVID frontlines, she sought change, buying a gravel bike and setting off with no formal training. Starting in Spain, her journey became an unplanned adventure. She traversed the Pyrenees and Alps and cycled through Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In Africa, she braved 50°C Sahara heat and faced civil war in Sudan, forcing an evacuation before resuming in Tanzania. Her 8000km trek included encounters with lions, drawing water from rivers and sleeping under the stars.

She completed her 24,000km journey on 14 January 2024 at the Cape of Good Hope. “This journey was everything I hoped for and more,” Steph says.



Live events

Connecting with audiences during live events around the country is a vital way in which the Society fosters connections and builds community.

Australian Geographic Awards for Nature

17 OCTOBER 2024, 7PM
DOMAIN THEATRE,
ART GALLERY
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Our inaugural presentation of the Awards for Nature took place in the elegant surrounds of the art gallery with Rachel Ward AM as special guest.

More than 200 guests watched Rachel's documentary about her regenerative farming efforts on the NSW north coast, *Rachel's Farm*, and were able to ask questions afterwards.

Three awardees received their trophies and grants after seeing a short documentary of their projects created by the Australian Geographic digital team.

Among the guests were Rachel's husband Bryan Brown, Dick and Pip Smith, and John Wamsley.





Left: Awards Roadshow comes to the Sun Theatre in Yarraville.

Below: Dr Dean Miller will lead the 2025 Coral Futures Expedition.

Australian Geographic Awards Roadshow

VARIOUS DATES ACROSS AUSTRALIA

In 2024, the Society held six live events around the country. Four of these were Awards Roadshows featuring past and future awardees. All were well attended, and between the four the Society hosted more than 400 guests. The Sydney event was a sellout. They were held in Sydney, Melbourne, Launceston and the Gold Coast.

The 2024 events were as follows:

Sydney 6 February at the Hayden Orpheum, Cremorne
Speakers: Richard Barnes and Tom Robinson

Launceston 22 February at Du Cane Brewery
Speakers: Lewi Taylor and Paul Pritchard

Melbourne 28 February at Sun Theatre, Yarraville
Speakers: Heather Swan, Glenn Singleman and Dr Kate Leeming OAM

Gold Coast 31 July at Currumbin Sanctuary
Speakers: Geoff Wilson AM, Kitalé Wilson and Tom Robinson

We would like to express special thanks to Du Cane Brewery and Sun Theatre, Yarraville, for their extra support for these events.

Each event had a ticket price between \$25 and \$30.

These affordable, live, in-person events replace the annual Awards Gala Dinner.

They provide a long-form platform for our awardees and sponsored adventurers to tell their full stories to engaged and interested audiences, and for the Society to celebrate success and achievement.



Coral Futures Expedition

4-11 DECEMBER 2025

The 2024 Australian Geographic Awards for Nature have initiated an exciting new travel opportunity.

A citizen science voyage, operated by Coral Expeditions, will embark for the first time in December 2025.

In an exciting new model that will raise significant funds for the Australian Geographic Society and Forever Reef, the voyage offers travellers unique opportunities to participate in processing of corals for the coral biobank along with other unique citizen science opportunities.



**Australian Geographic Society
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The Australian Geographic Society is a not-for-profit that supports Australian individuals and organisations that lead the way in nature conservation, scientific research, public education aimed at positive environmental outcomes, and the advancement of human knowledge through exploration. It's our vision to foster a community of well-informed, passionate Australians who are committed to finding solutions to the multiple threats facing our natural world.

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