

Australian
Geographic
Society



Impact Report

2025

The Burramys Project at Secret Creek, NSW, was the beneficiary of our biggest-ever single species fundraiser; an investment to save the mountain pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvus*).





Australian Geographic Society

In 2025, we deepened our commitment to conservation, inspiring Australians to protect and celebrate our extraordinary continent.

THE AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY (the Society) is a not-for-profit registered charity dedicated to supporting Australian individuals and organisations leading the way in nature conservation, scientific research, public education and exploration.

Our vision is to foster a well-informed, passionate community that is committed to finding solutions to the multiple threats facing our natural world.

In 2025, the Society pursued its mission through a suite of activities and programs designed to: engage the public in environmental issues; raise funds for species at risk; and, provide direct investment into initiatives delivering meaningful, on-ground impact. Alongside this, we continued to also recognise excellence in adventure and exploration, supporting individuals whose achievements exemplify and encourage a spirit of adventure, a founding aspiration of the Australian Geographic brand.

The Society's work is amplified through the Australian Geographic storytelling ecosystem, which includes the respected **AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC** magazine, books, digital platforms, live events, and strategic partnerships. This ensures that the impact of funded projects reaches a broad national audience.

The Society's bi-monthly fundraising campaign, **Australia's Most Endangered**, concluded a successful one-year partnership with **Australian Wildlife Conservancy** and commenced a new collaboration with **Bush Heritage Australia**. The year marked the second round of the **Australian Geographic Awards for Nature**, our new flagship funding initiative supporting high-impact conservation projects.

We also launched, in collaboration with our long-term commercial partner **Coral Expeditions**, the first citizen science voyage under the **Coral Futures** banner.

Previous funding for adventure and conservation continued to create lasting impact, and we began receiving progress reports from the first three projects to receive funding through our 2024 awards for nature program.

2025 FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

In the 12 months to December 2025, the Society disbursed

\$345,100

in direct conservation funding.

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On the cover: The Palm Cockatoo Breeding Habitat Restoration Project in Cape York was the recipient of a bronze tier \$20,000 Award for Nature in October 2025.

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Welcome to the 2025 Impact Report

By investing in people making a real difference for nature, and sharing their stories, this report shows how your support turns ideas into impact.



EVERYTHING WE DO at the Society is driven by a simple philosophy: back the people out there making a difference. Whether it's conservation on the ground, scientific research, or public education, we're proud to offer targeted financial and practical support to individuals and organisations working

on the front line. It's about helping turn good ideas into tangible outcomes for the natural world while deepening our understanding along the way.

A big part of how we do that is through storytelling. Through AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC, our flagship bi-monthly magazine, along with our digital platforms, partnerships and live events, we share the work of scientists, conservationists and explorers in a way that brings it to life. These stories connect people to place and to those individuals shaping Australia's environmental future.

At the heart of it all is our community – our subscribers, donors and supporters – whose belief in what we do makes it possible. Keeping you informed about how funds are raised, where they go, and the impact they achieve is incredibly important to me and the Society board. It's how we build trust and hold ourselves accountable.

This is our second standalone Impact Report. It's designed to be a clear and open account of the year – what we've supported, what's been achieved – and where we're heading next. It also marks our commitment to sharing this story each year, in print and online, so you can see the difference you're helping to make.

Australian Geographic donates its profits to the Society. Every subscription or product bought from our online store helps us achieve our goals. We do so in many ways through the programs and partnerships described in this report, all of which took place in the 12 months to December 2025.

Thank you for your generous and loyal support.

Chrissie Goldrick
Executive Chair, Australian Geographic Society
cgoldrick@australiangeographic.com



A volunteer uses a mechanical planter for native seeds at Ediegarrup Reserve, a 1067ha former cereal farm in south-west WA managed by Bush Heritage Australia.

Total 2025 disbursements

\$345,100

● Donations

\$165,700

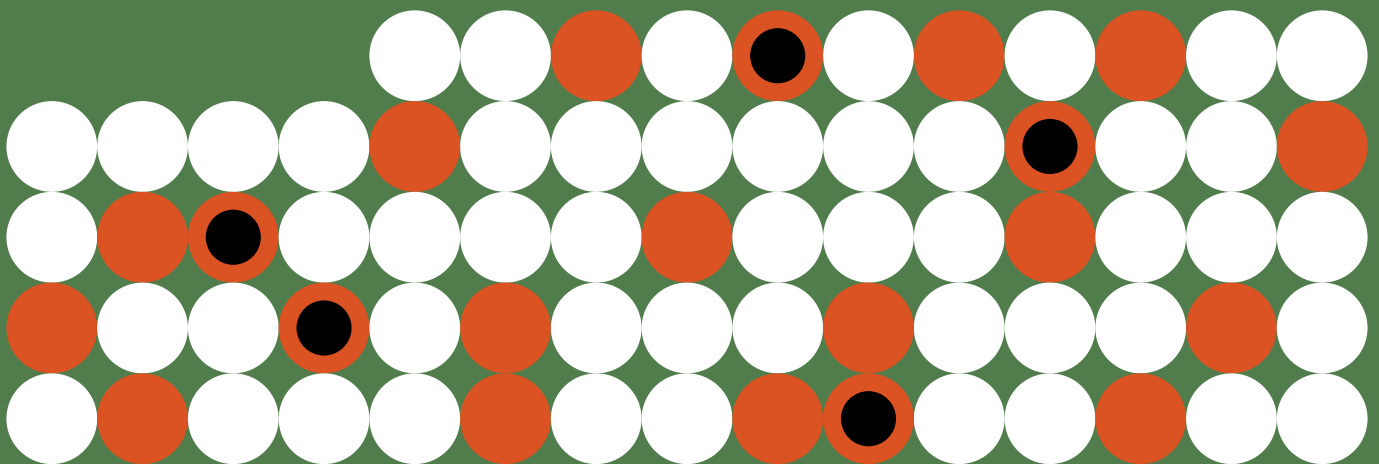
● Grants

\$179,400



Awards for Nature 2025 funding pool

\$150,000



71 EOIs received ●

21 projects shortlisted ●

5 projects funded ●



AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC AWARDS FOR NATURE

The second year of the flagship grant program saw \$150,000 in Society funds disbursed to five exemplary projects.

IN 2025, the Australian Geographic Society delivered the second year of its flagship funding initiative, the Australian Geographic Awards for Nature – building on a strategic shift towards fewer, but higher-value, grants designed to deliver meaningful, on-ground impact.

Following an inaugural funding pool of \$100,000 across three awards in 2024, the program expanded to \$150,000 across five awards in 2025, reflecting both the strength of the concept and the calibre of applicants it attracts.

A competitive two-stage application process was launched in January, designed to be rigorous without unnecessary complexity. Projects were required to demonstrate a strong scientific foundation, meaningful community participation that includes First Nations engagement, and the capacity to manage funds responsibly. The Awards are intentionally focused on solutions; supporting projects that respond to urgent environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss, invasive species, habitat degradation and climate change.

The response was both strong and encouraging. A total of 71 single-page Expressions of Interest were received from across Australia. These spanned species recovery, landscape-scale restoration and emerging technologies for environmental monitoring. From this field, 21 projects were invited to submit full applications.

The full application process was administered with the generous support of the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, led by Ian Darbyshire, who also served as an expert reviewer. An independent panel – drawn from across the conservation and research sectors and including Dr John Wamsley OAM, Rachel Lowry, Dr Tony Friend and Dr Jennifer Anson – provided detailed assessment of shortlisted projects.

From this highly competitive field, five projects were selected that, collectively, address critical environmental challenges across Australia. Each is led by capable, committed teams employing evidence-based approaches that integrate contemporary science with community engagement and First Nations knowledge.

The awards were presented by renowned conservationist Valerie Taylor AM at a public ceremony attended by more than 200 guests and held at the Australian Museum in Sydney on 23 October 2025.

Funded projects will report on their progress over a period of up to three years. This ensures accountability while enabling the Society to share outcomes with its community.

In 2026, the Society will again offer \$150,000 across five Awards for Nature, continuing to invest in projects that deliver both tangible conservation outcomes and compelling stories of hope and action.

AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC INTERNAL REVIEW PANEL 2025

- **David Haslingden**, publisher of Australian Geographic and a director of the Society.
- **Karen McGhee**, Editor-in-Chief, Australian Geographic
- **Chrissie Goldrick**, Chair, Australian Geographic Society and former Editor-in-Chief of Australian Geographic, 2013-2023

AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC EXPERT REVIEW PANEL 2025

- **Dr Jennifer Anson**, Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- **Ian Darbyshire**, Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife
- **Dr Tony Friend**, ecologist (formerly with CALM, WA)
- **Rachel Lowry**, Bush Heritage
- **Dr John Wamsley OAM**, environmental leader



2025
AWARD
WINNERS

2025 GOLD TIER / \$50,000

Bug Hunt

Leader: Jack Gough

*Mobilising a nation to protect its
smallest and most overlooked wildlife*

Australia's biodiversity crisis has many fronts, but one of the least understood plays out at the scale of a thumbnail. Tiny invasive invertebrates such as ants, beetles, flies, mites and borers, arrive quietly, spread quickly and can unravel ecosystems before we've even noticed.

Bug Hunt, led by the **Invasive Species Council**, tackles this challenge head-on by turning everyday Australians into frontline biosecurity 'agents'.

At its core is a simple, powerful idea: participants photograph invertebrates in their backyard or local park and upload to **iNaturalist**. These images feed directly into the **Atlas of Living Australia**, creating a real-time surveillance map of species movements, hotspots and potential new incursions.

The project arrives at a critical moment. About 70 per cent of Australia's invertebrate species are yet to be formally described, meaning every observation has the potential to be significant. Early detection of invasive species is essential; once established, they are costly to control and can have devastating impacts on native ecosystems.

At the same time, native invertebrates play essential roles as pollinators, decomposers and ecosystem engineers. By paying attention to them, we are protecting the foundations of our natural systems.

The funding will enable Bug Hunt to scale nationally through three key initiatives:

- the launch of "**Bugs in My Backyard Week**", a nationwide participation event
- development of curriculum-linked educational resources for schools
- a campaign reframing invertebrates as essential wildlife rather than creepy crawlies

There is a quiet optimism at the heart of Bug Hunt; one that builds skills, confidence and connection to nature while generating data scientists urgently need but could never gather alone. At a time when environmental news can feel relentlessly grim, it offers a genuinely empowering way for Australians to make a difference, one smartphone observation at a time.



Bug Hunt will engage citizen scientists of all ages to become involved in capturing photos of insects and uploading them to iNaturalist.





2025 SILVER TIER / \$30,000

C411 Country – saving Victoria's faunal emblems

Leader: Arabella Eyre

Restoring landscape, culture and hope

On Wurundjeri Country in Victoria's Yarra Valley, a remarkable partnership is reshaping the future of two of the state's most endangered species – the **helmeted honeyeater** and the lowland **Leadbeater's possum** (pictured above).

Fewer than 200 helmeted honeyeaters remain. The lowland Leadbeater's possum population sits at just 37 individuals. Both are at a tipping point. What they need is not simply more habitat, but connected landscapes that allow them to move, feed, breed and adapt.

The **C411 Country project**, led by the **Nangana Landcare Network** in partnership with **Wurundjeri Traditional Owners**, is working to create that landscape at scale. Its vision spans 128,000ha of potential habitat and corridors, radiating out from the culturally significant **Coranderrk** area.

The approach is long-term and grounded in both ecological science and cultural knowledge. Traditional Owners are central to decision-making, shaping a program that integrates cultural fire, revegetation, citizen science and predator control into a cohesive restoration strategy.



The Society's Silver Tier funding will support the next phase of this work:

- engaging landholders to map and restore biodiversity corridors
- managing threats across fragmented landscapes
- building a 20-year pathway to recovery

This project builds on the success of the earlier **Beyond Yellingbo** initiative, which restored 372ha across 121 private properties, demonstrating that when landholders are supported, biodiversity can rebound.

What makes C411 Country particularly compelling is its emphasis on connection – between habitats, between species, and between people and Country. It is not simply environmental restoration, it is cultural renewal and community empowerment.



Middle: Helmeted honeyeaters teeter on the brink of extinction.

Bottom: Landcare's volunteer workforce is determined to prevent that happening.



Left: The stone country of western Arnhem Land.

Below: Warddeken Daluk ranger Aspelita Guymala sets a camera trap as part of the Mayh Project.

2025 SILVER TIER / \$30,000

Warddeken Mayh Recovery Program

Project coordinator: Dr Cara Penton

Indigenous rangers leading conservation at scale

In the stone country of western Arnhem Land, one of Australia's most biologically rich and culturally significant landscapes, the **Warddeken Mayh Recovery Program** is restoring Country on a breathtaking scale.

Spanning 1.4 million ha, the program addresses the rapid decline of northern Australia's small mammals, including quolls and possums, and grasswrens. These species have been impacted by late-season wildfires, feral herbivores and the disruption of traditional land management practices.

The response is both modern and ancient, combining contemporary ecological science with thousands of years of Indigenous knowledge.

Warddeken rangers have established an extensive monitoring network using motion-sensor cameras and acoustic devices, confirming the presence of more than 10 nationally significant threatened species.

The Society's funding will support:

- reinstating cultural burning practices to restore mosaic fire regimes
- targeted control of feral herbivores
- creation of artificial shelters for vulnerable species
- expansion of monitoring to track ecological recovery

In this landscape, conservation is inseparable from culture. **Caring for Country** is not a program, it is a continuation of stewardship stretching back millennia.

The remoteness of the region presents logistical challenges, but the results are profound. Each confirmed sighting of a threatened species is evidence that recovery is possible when Country is properly cared for.



IMAGE CREDITS: COURTESY OF WARDDEKEN IPA



Dr Dominic McAfee conducts an underwater survey on an artificial oyster reef in Coffin Bay, South Australia.



2025 BRONZE TIER / \$20,000

Reviving Coffin Bay's Lost Oyster Reefs

Leader: Dr Dominic McAfee

Rebuilding underwater communities

Along much of Australia's southern coastline a vital ecosystem has almost disappeared. Once, vast oyster reefs stretched for thousands of kilometres, filtering water, supporting fisheries and providing habitat for marine life. By the early 20th century, they had been largely lost.

In Coffin Bay, South Australia, marine ecologist **Dr Dominic McAfee** from **Adelaide University**, and his collaborators, including **Manny Katz** of **Eyrelab**, are working to bring these ecosystems back.

Oyster reefs are ecological powerhouses. A single oyster can filter up to 150 litres of water per day. As reefs grow, they improve water clarity, stabilise sediments and create complex habitat for fish, crabs and other marine life.

What began as a small, community-led effort has grown into one of Australia's most significant marine restoration initiatives.

The Society's funding will support:

- establishment of a shell-processing and reef-building hub
- expansion of volunteer and school participation
- long-term monitoring using cameras and underwater acoustics

Following a devastating **algal bloom** in 2025, reef restoration has become a powerful symbol of renewal for the region, a way for communities to actively rebuild the ecosystems they depend on.

Following the Society's award, the project also received substantial funding from the **South Australian government** when these artificial reefs showed significant resilience to the algal bloom.



2025 BRONZE TIER / \$20,000

Palm Cockatoo Breeding-Habitat Restoration

Leaders: Dr Christina Zdenek
and Dr Daniel Natusch

Creating the conditions for survival

In the woodlands of Cape York, one of Australia's most extraordinary birds depends on something increasingly rare – large nesting hollows in old-growth trees.

The palm cockatoo breeds slowly and requires hollows that can take centuries to form. As these trees are lost to fire and disturbance, breeding opportunities decline.

This project, led by **People for Wildlife** in partnership with the **Apudthama Land & Sea Rangers**, addresses that constraint directly by creating new nesting hollows and protecting existing ones.

Hollows must be precisely shaped, positioned and protected to ensure they are suitable for breeding and resilient to environmental conditions.

The Society's funding will support:

- creation of 28 artificial hollows by mid-2027
- establishment of 56 protective firebreaks
- expanded monitoring using cameras and acoustic devices

For the rangers, this work is deeply connected to culture and Country. Their knowledge informs where hollows are placed and how landscapes are managed over time.

This project is a powerful reminder that conservation often hinges on small, specific interventions. In this case, the future of a species depends on the availability of a single resource – a hollow in a tree.

Within a few weeks of the first artificial hollows being installed in early 2026, palm cockatoos were seen using one and, at the time of going to print, a palmie chick had been photographed in the new hollow.



The spectacular palm cockatoo faces loss of nesting hollows due to lack of availability of old growth trees, mostly due to land use changes and uncontrolled fires.

2024 IMPACT UPDATES

2024 AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC
SOCIETY GOLD AWARD FOR
NATURE / \$50,000

Forever Reef Project

Leader: Dr Dean Miller

*Safeguarding the future
of coral reefs*

The Australian Geographic Society's inaugural \$50,000 Gold Award for Nature, presented in October 2024, is supporting critical progress for the Forever Reef Project at a time when the **Great Barrier Reef** is under unprecedented pressure.

Finishing 2025 with strong momentum, the project has rapidly expanded its living coral collection. In February this year, 90 new colonies were added, bringing the total to more than 200 species. Forever Reef is now believed to be the most diverse land-based coral collection in the world.

Scientific validation is underway: **Dr Charlie Veron** is classifying new specimens, and genetic analysis is being conducted by teams at the **Smithsonian Institution** and **Queensland Museum**.

These advances come at a critical moment. The reef continues to face cyclones, flooding and rising sea temperatures, with the summer of 2025–26 marking the sixth mass bleaching event in just nine years.

Dr Charlie Veron and Dr Dean Miller (centre) were among the crew on an early-2026 collecting expedition that added 90 new colonies to Forever Reef.



“What we’re building is essentially an ark for coral biodiversity; a living archive that safeguards species we may otherwise lose, and gives future generations a chance to restore reefs when conditions allow.”

Dr Dean Miller, Forever Reef

In response, Forever Reef has committed to an intensive year-long collection program between Cairns and Cooktown, undertaken in collaboration with the **Kuku Yalanji and Yirrganydji Traditional Custodians**. Society funding has directly supported this expansion. The Port Douglas facility now holds up to **12,000 live coral fragments** following the addition of new tanks, alongside a purpose-built quarantine facility for 120 colonies. Together, this work is creating a living archive of coral biodiversity, preserving species that may otherwise be lost and laying the groundwork for future reef restoration. The Society is proud to support an initiative that offers both immediate impact and enduring hope for the Great Barrier Reef.



Left: School students take part in a B&B Highway program. **Below:** Volunteers clean up a Queensland beach as part of Tangaroa Blue's Great Barrier Reef Clean-Up week in October 2025.

2024 BRONZE TIER / \$20,000

PlantingSeeds B&B Highway

Leader: Dr Judy Friedlander

*Connecting communities
through urban biodiversity*

The **PlantingSeeds B&B Highway** program continues to expand its reach, connecting urban communities through pollinator habitat restoration and education.

Now active in more than **220 schools** across **Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane** and **Adelaide**, the initiative combines hands-on planting with citizen science and curriculum-linked learning.

Society funding has supported new school sites while enabling the program to extend beyond school grounds into surrounding neighbourhoods.

Projects in Melbourne have catalysed community participation, with residents planting nature strips to create connected habitat corridors.

In Sydney, the program is adapting to higher-density environments, exploring biodiversity solutions for smaller spaces such as balconies and urban gardens.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate how cities can play a vital role in restoring biodiversity while fostering environmental stewardship in young people.



2024 SILVER TIER / \$30,000

Australian Marine Debris Initiative

Leader: Heidi Tait

Expanding a national monitoring network

The AMDI Monitoring Network, delivered by **Tangaroa Blue Foundation**, continued to expand its community-led shoreline monitoring throughout 2025.

Originally aiming to establish four new sites, the program exceeded expectations, with six active monitoring locations operating across **Victoria** and **South Australia** by October.

Sites on Victoria's **Phillip Island** and **Mornington Peninsula**, and SA's **Eyre Peninsula** are now contributing data to the **AMDI Database**, with trained volunteers building confidence and capability through ongoing support.

Quarterly online meetings have helped connect participants, enabling shared learning and reinforcing best-practice monitoring.

This growing network is strengthening both the quality of data collected and the national understanding of marine debris and its impacts.



National Bilby Awareness Week

*Reframing an icon. Mobilising a nation.
Inspiring Australians to protect a beloved
species and restore fragile ecosystems together.*

NATIONAL BILBY AWARENESS WEEK launched in 2025 as a new annual campaign in the lead-up to Easter, with the aim of repositioning the greater bilby (*Macrotis lagotis*) as a culturally significant native icon.

Built around the message **'Bilbies, not bunnies'**, the campaign seeks to shift public perception while raising awareness of the species' ecological importance. As a keystone species, the bilby plays a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems and its protection delivers broader environmental benefits.

The campaign also highlights the ongoing threat posed by invasive species such as foxes and rabbits, which continue to drive biodiversity loss and impact agricultural systems across Australia.

Aligned with the national **Greater Bilby Recovery Plan**, the initiative supports efforts to:

- grow bilby populations
- protect and reconnect habitat
- maintain genetic diversity
- strengthen First Nations involvement in conservation

Through storytelling and multimedia content, the campaign shares insights into bilby biology, behaviour and conservation success stories, enriched by First Nations knowledge and perspectives.

A central online hub is envisaged to provide resources, updates and event information, supported by partnerships across media, conservation organisations, zoos and community groups.

In 2025, Australian Geographic entered into a unique partnership with **Dreamworld** on the Gold Coast, where its wildlife precinct was renamed **Wild with Australian Geographic**. The site is home to the **Bilby Discovery Centre**, where Easter activations bring the campaign to life for the public.

With opportunities for engagement spanning schools, community events and national media, National Bilby Awareness Week has the potential to become a unifying platform for conservation action, positioning the bilby as a powerful symbol of hope for Australia's native wildlife.



Face painting and cookie making are just some of the activities that families can enjoy at Dreamworld during Bilby Awareness Week.



Australia's Most Endangered

Mobilising public support for native species at risk through strategic partnerships with leading conservation bodies and public fundraising.

EVERY TWO MONTHS, aligned with the publication of AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC magazine, the Society runs a national fundraising campaign focused on a single at-risk native species.

These campaigns are delivered across the print magazine, digital platforms and through Australian Geographic's retail partner, **QBD Books**, where proceeds from reusable bag sales contribute to fundraising totals.

In 2024, the program was rebranded as **Australia's Most Endangered**, providing a clear identity and reinforcing the urgency of the conservation challenges it supports.

A key evolution has been the introduction of annual partnerships with large conservation organisations, enabling deeper collaboration, reduced administrative overheads and more sustained storytelling across multiple target species.

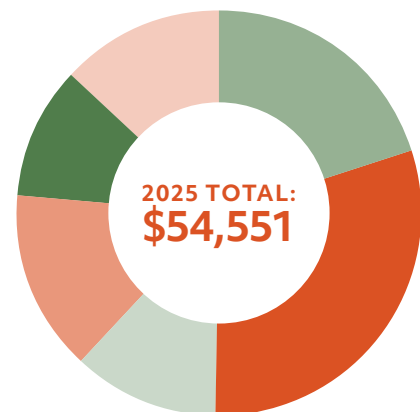
The inaugural partner, **Australian Wildlife Conservancy**, concluded in early 2025, raising **\$80,384.43** across six campaigns.

In May–June 2025, the Society commenced a new one-year partnership with **Bush Heritage Australia**, supporting landscape-scale conservation initiatives across the country.

oOh!media partnership

Our native species campaigns have benefited from a special relationship between Australian Geographic and oOh!media, Australia's biggest outdoor advertising company. oOh!media generously places AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC magazine content onto its premium advertising screens when possible. This includes highlighting native species that have been the subject of Society fundraising. The screens are beautifully designed by oOh!media's team and located in high-traffic locations such as airports and shopping malls where they are seen by millions of people.

AUSTRALIA'S MOST ENDANGERED 2025 FUNDRAISING TOTALS



- **JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025**
Bridled nailtail wallaby **\$10,940**
- **MARCH/APRIL 2025**
Greater bilby **\$16,580**
- **MAY/JUNE 2025**
Yellow-footed rock-wallaby **\$6,305**
- **JULY/AUGUST 2025**
Red-tailed phascogale **\$7,866**
- **SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025**
Greater glider **\$5,770**
- **NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025**
Night parrot **\$7,090**

Through these campaigns, the Society continues to connect Australians directly with the species most in need, translating awareness into tangible conservation outcomes.



Special projects

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

The Forktree Project

Leader: Tim Jarvis AM

Restoring landscape, building knowledge

The Forktree Project is restoring a 54ha former pastoral property on South Australia's Fleurieu Peninsula to native habitat.

Established in 2019 by environmental scientist and **Australian Geographic Society Advisory Committee** member Tim Jarvis, the project aims to reverse decades of land clearing through large-scale planting and natural regeneration. Over time, this work will support the return of native wildlife while sequestering carbon, which contributes to climate change mitigation.

On-ground efforts focus on re-establishing native vegetation communities reflective of the pre-cleared landscape. The site is also evolving into a centre for education and engagement, with plans for an interpretive hub and seed nursery to support local restoration efforts.

Beyond its physical footprint, Forktree serves as a model for how smaller landholdings can contribute meaningfully to biodiversity recovery. By trialling accessible methods for measuring carbon sequestration, the project is helping to build pathways for broader participation in carbon markets.

5-YEAR FUNDING SNAPSHOT

\$373,798.90

donated through the Australian Geographic Society since 2020

Together, these efforts demonstrate how practical, science-based restoration can deliver both local and national environmental benefits.



Society chair Chrissie Goldrick with Forktree leader Tim Jarvis during a visit to the regeneration project on the Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia.



Sustained impact

While the Society transitioned to the Awards for Nature model in 2024, projects supported through previous funding rounds continued to deliver meaningful outcomes throughout 2025.



Little Penguin, Big City

Monitoring wildlife in an urban environment

Monitoring the little penguin colony at **St Kilda** in Melbourne presents unique challenges. Nesting within a busy urban breakwater, these seabirds require consistent, low-impact observation.

With support from the Society, researchers from **Monash University** – including **Dr Richard Reina** and PhD candidate **Julia Morais** (left) – trialled an innovative approach combining thermal imaging with citizen science. A specialised camera mounted on the St Kilda ferry enabled continuous, non-invasive monitoring over a full year.

Footage was analysed by students and volunteers, demonstrating that citizen scientists can contribute meaningfully to long-term population monitoring when supported by appropriate technology and statistical modelling.

The results show strong potential for scaling this approach, particularly in urban environments where traditional monitoring is difficult.

Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital

Leader: Dr Stephen Van Mil

Permanent care for wildlife

After nearly five years on the road, Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital opened a new, purpose-built home in Lennox Head in 2025. The move relieves pressure on its mobile unit 'Matilda', now free to return to fieldwork and emergencies. Director Dr Stephen Van Mil says the new facility enables more effective, large-scale care for native wildlife.



Above: Veterinary staff treat an injured koala at Byron Bay.

Below: Researchers at Flinders University study the scale of marine plastic pollution.

Ears on the Ocean

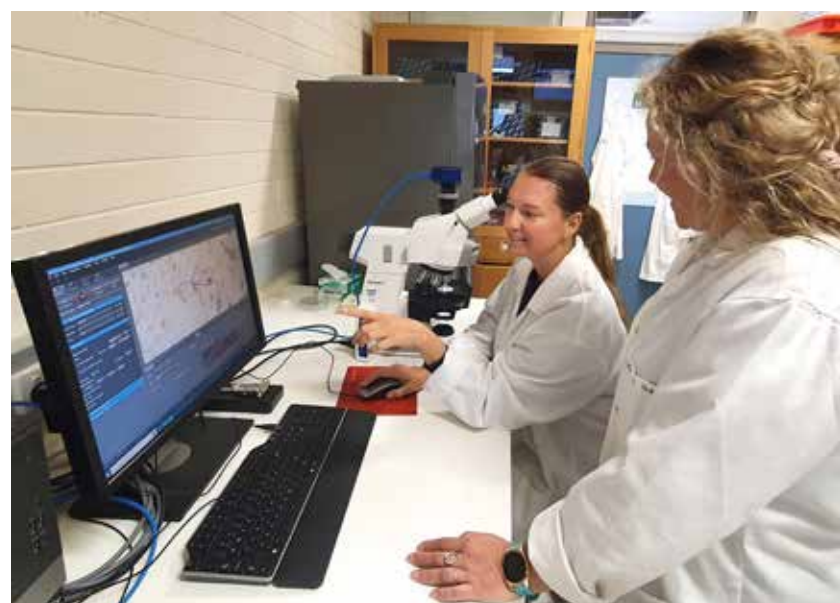
Leader: Dr Olaf Meynecke

Listening to whale migration

The **East Coast Marine Sounds** project is using acoustic technology to better understand whale migration along Australia's east coast.

Seven long-term hydrophones (below) have been deployed from southern NSW to north Queensland, capturing underwater soundscapes that help track whale presence and movement. Citizen science plays a key role, with community groups deploying handheld devices to expand monitoring coverage.

By combining community participation, university research and AI-driven analysis, the project represents a new model for collaborative marine science.



Cleaning Up Our Oceans

Leader: Dr Anastasiia Snigirova

Building a baseline for microplastics research

Understanding microplastic pollution has been hindered by a lack of reliable baseline data.

With Society support, researchers at **Flinders University** examined microplastic distribution in **Gulf St Vincent**, South Australia, analysing particles across the water column. The study found an average of 29 particles per litre, with similar concentrations at the surface and depth, highlighting the role of currents and wind in dispersing microplastics. This work provides a critical evidence base for environmental agencies and supports future research into ecological and human health impacts.





Adventure and exploration

The spirit of adventure fuels discovery and connects people, place and purpose in the pursuit of something greater.

THE SOCIETY fosters a spirit of adventure as a means of deepening connection with Australia's landscapes, wildlife and cultural heritage.

Since 1986, the Society has supported thousands of Australian adventurers undertaking expeditions across Australia and around the world. These journeys contribute not only to exploration, but to scientific understanding, environmental awareness and storytelling.

Although the formal sponsorship program was paused in 2024 pending the development of a new funding model, Society-supported expeditions continued to unfold throughout 2025.

The Society maintained its commitment to sharing these journeys and celebrating the individuals behind them.

Steph Devery, 2024 Spirit of Adventure award winner, as she cycled south through the African continent.



IMAGE CREDIT, STEPH DEVERY



Lucy Barnard

Walking the length of the Earth

Lucy Barnard is undertaking a historic 30,000km journey from the southernmost point of South America to Alaska, aiming to become the first woman to walk the length of the Earth.

Awarded the Society's **Nancy Bird Walton grant** in 2019, and additional support in 2024, Lucy has navigated extreme environments, complex logistics and cultural boundaries since beginning her journey in 2017.

In 2024, she was named **Australian Geographic Society Adventurer of the Year** in recognition of her extraordinary achievement and the powerful storytelling that has accompanied it.

Above: Lucy Barnard and her dog Wombat reach Mount Assiniboine Provincial Park, on the border of Alberta and British Columbia in the Canadian Rockies on the way to their destination in Alaska.



Sea to Summit: Antarctica

Exploration meets science

In January 2025, **James McAloon** (above) completed a 'Sea to Summit' expedition to **Mt Vinson**, Antarctica's highest peak, following a 230km ski traverse across remote glacial terrain. Working alongside climate scientist Dr Wolfgang Rack, the expedition collected environmental data across largely unstudied regions, contributing to the understanding of Antarctic conditions and climate change.

Lisa Blair OAM

Pushing the boundaries of ocean exploration

On Australia Day 2025, sailor Lisa Blair (below) was awarded the **Order of Australia** for services to sailing.

A two-time **Adventurer of the Year**, Lisa is known for her solo circumnavigations of Antarctica aboard *Climate Action Now*.

Her next ambition is to build a sustainable vessel and attempt a solo circumnavigation of the Arctic Circle.



AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC ADVENTURER OF THE YEAR



IN 2024, the Society rebranded its long-running adventure awards, refining their focus and reinforcing their place as Australia's most prestigious recognition of exploration.

Four categories are awarded annually:

- **Young Adventurer of the Year**
- **Spirit of Adventure**
- **Adventurer of the Year**
- **Lifetime of Adventure**

The 2024 awards recognised a diverse range of achievements, from global expeditions to deeply personal journeys of resilience.

At the pinnacle, the Lifetime of Adventure Award was presented to filmmaker **Michael Dillon AM**, whose seven-decade career has documented some of the world's most significant expeditions.

Lucy Barnard was named Adventurer of the Year for her ongoing transcontinental journey, while **Tom Robinson** and **Steph Devery** were recognised for their endurance, determination and personal courage.

Together, these awardees represent the many dimensions of adventure; exploration, storytelling, resilience and transformation.



Above: Lucy Barnard and Wombat were both awarded medallions in 2024.

Left: Mike Dillon's outstanding contribution to adventure filmmaking was honoured.





Coral Futures Expedition

Setting sail for a better future, a group of enthusiastic citizen scientists joined our first Coral Futures expedition.



IN DECEMBER 2025, the inaugural Coral Futures Expedition departed Cairns, bringing together scientists, educators and participants for a seven-night voyage across remote sections of the Great Barrier Reef. This initiative came out of the 2025 Australian Geographic Awards for Nature and the winning **Forever Reef** project led by **Dr Dean Miller** and was a partnership between the **Australian Geographic Society**, **Coral Expeditions** and **Great Barrier Reef Legacy**, which operates Forever Reef. The voyage was designed to create an opportunity for the public to become involved with the coral biobank project and participate in reef-focused citizen science projects guided by Dean and his expert team.

Those projects included Eye on the Reef, Mangrove Watch, and Coral Watch, contributing valuable data to ongoing monitoring efforts.

A highlight of the journey was an exclusive visit to the newly opened Forever Reef coral biobank facility in beautiful Port Douglas, offering an exclusive insight into one of the world's most ambitious coral conservation initiatives.

Joining the guests and experts on board was Awards for Nature ambassador **Rachel Ward AM** and **Bryan Brown AM** as well as Society director **David Haslingden** and his wife **Alexa Haslingden**.

The expedition demonstrated how engaged travellers can contribute meaningfully to conservation while deepening their understanding of the natural world.

The voyage raised **\$50,000** for the Australian Geographic Society from which **\$20,000** of continuation funding went towards the Forever Reef Project on top of its **\$50,000** gold tier Award for Nature grant received in 2024.



Live events

Live on-stage events provide opportunities for audiences and Society heroes to meet and exchange information and questions.

Australian Geographic Roadshow

In 2025, the Society hosted a series of live events in Sydney and Melbourne, providing a platform for adventurers and storytellers to share their experiences directly with audiences.

Events included:

- **Lucy Barnard: The Woman Walking the World – Sydney**
- **The Great White Whale screening with Michael Dillon – Melbourne**
- **Larapinta: End to End screening with Paul Pritchard – Sydney**

These events offer a long-form storytelling platform, deepening audience engagement and connection.

2025 AG ROADSHOW

400+
attendees across
three events

Below: Paul Pritchard (centre) and Paul Allen with Society chair Chrissie Goldrick who hosted the Q&A Screening at the State Library of New South Wales.



An Evening with Paul Pritchard

More than 125 guests attended an inspiring evening with Paul Pritchard at the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney.

His documentary **Larapinta: End to End** follows a team of adventurers living with significant health challenges as they traverse the Larapinta Trail.

Paul's message, centred on resilience, independence and the right to pursue adventure, resonated strongly with the audience, reinforcing the Society's commitment to inclusive exploration.





Australian Geographic Awards for Nature

Held on **23 October 2025** at the **Australian Museum**, the Awards for Nature event brought together conservationists, scientists and supporters to celebrate the Society's flagship program.

The evening combined the presentation of five awards with a preview of the **Australian Geographic Nature Photographer of the Year exhibition**, highlighting the role of storytelling in conservation.

Each of the winning projects came to the stage to accept their awards from Society director **David Haslingden** and legendary shark conservationist **Valerie Taylor AM**. The event was emceed by Society chair **Chrissie Goldrick**.

The winner of the 2025 Australian Geographic Nature Photographer of the Year, **Ross Gudgeon**, was also on hand to receive the appreciation of the assembled crowd for his intriguing winning photo of the inside of a cauliflower coral.

The Society acknowledges the museum's director **Kim McKay AO** and the staff of the Australian Museum for their generosity and expertise in organising and hosting the event on behalf of the Australian Geographic Society. The 2026 Awards for Nature event and exclusive preview of the Australian Geographic Nature Photographer of the Year exhibition will once again be held in the museum, on **10 September 2026**.



Among the winners were Bug Hunt (**top left**) and the Mayh Project (**bottom**). More than 200 people attended the event at the Australian Museum (**below**).





Our People

The Australian Geographic Society acknowledges the individuals and organisations who generously support us.

The Society welcomes two new directors

In 2025, we welcomed two new directors to the Society board. John Fahey (USA) and Hugo Heath (UK) bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the board.

John M. Fahey Jr. is a former Chairman and CEO of the **National Geographic Society**, where he led a major transformation of the organisation from 1998 to 2013. During his tenure, he expanded National Geographic's global reach across television, publishing and digital platforms, and strengthened its mission-driven programs in exploration, science and education. John brings deep experience in media, storytelling and nonprofit leadership to his role as a Director of the Australian Geographic Society.

Hugo Heath is a former senior executive at **HSBC**. With a strong background in banking, finance and corporate leadership, he brings expertise in capital management, risk and strategic growth. Hugo supports the Society's financial sustainability and helps strengthen partnerships that enable continued investment in conservation, science and storytelling initiatives across Australia.

We acknowledge and thank those individuals and organisations who support us in our mission.

Australian Geographic, QBD Books, Coral Expeditions, oOh!media, Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, Bush Heritage Australia, Australian Conservation Foundation, Australian Museum, Marini Ferlazzo, James Hough, Aussie Ark, Valerie Taylor AM, Rachel Ward AM, Dreamworld, Michael Smith.

We also acknowledge the contribution of the subscribers of the **Australian Geographic magazine** who are the members of the Australian Geographic Society. Without their loyal support, these programs would not be possible.

We thank those generous individuals who donate funds directly to the Australian Geographic Society.



Australian Geographic Society

Patron: Dick Smith AC

Board of Directors

Chair: Chrissie Goldrick

Treasurer: David Haslingden

Company Secretary: Page Henty

Directors: Peter Anderson, Nick Croydon, Christian Dunk, John M. Fahey Jr., Hugo Heath, Michael Minns

Advisory Committee: Chris Bray, Tim Jarvis AM, John Leece AM, Robert Purves AM, Anna Rose, Michael Smith, Heather Swan, Todd Tai

About the Australian Geographic Society

The Australian Geographic Society is a not-for-profit supporting conservation, research, education and exploration to deliver positive environmental outcomes and foster a community committed to protecting the natural world.

The Australian Geographic Society is a not-for-profit company and registered charity.

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Back cover: green and golden bell frog
by Esther Beaton.

Australian
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