

Serventy Conservation Medal for 2006

Each year the Serventy Conservation Award is made to a very special person who has been outstanding in their commitment to the preservation of Australian wildlife. This year the Award was made to **Lindsay E. Smith OAM of Unanderra** in New South Wales for his outstanding wildlife conservation work involving seabirds.



Photo compliments of the Australian Wildlife Preservation Society.
Lindsay Smith.OAM. Being presented with the Serventy Conservation Medal for 2006
By The Hon Mr. Bob Debus.MP Minister for the Environment



Shy Albatross
(Photographer Brook Whyllie, SOSSA)

Lindsay Smith has, through his devotion to wildlife conservation, become one of Australia's experts on seabirds, especially the albatross. Although he would modestly describe himself as an amateur, he is frequently called upon by the media to speak about seabirds and in 1987 the Australian Museum employed him as an ornithologist for research on Middleton and Elizabeth Reefs. Lindsay, with others, has been actively studying the seabirds visiting the coast near Wollongong for over fifty years. This represents the longest continuous albatross study in the world. He was involved in the foundation of the Southern Oceans Seabird Study Association Inc. in 1994. As a result of SOSSA's work, the plight of the albatrosses and other seabirds was brought to the attention, not only of Australians, but of people throughout the world.

Lindsay believes the Illawarra coastline of New South Wales is one of the most unique places on the planet for marine wildlife. It is right on our doorstep and most people are totally unaware of its great diversity. Lindsay's life long mission has been to bring wildlife and people together. With seabirds it is often a case of "out of site out of mind" The great albatrosses are amongst the most regal of birds and has no fear of people. Many of the world's albatross and petrel species are threatened with extinction, mainly because of the impacts of longline fishing.

Lindsay's long dedication to the saving of endangered species make him a worthy recipient and winner of the 2006 Serventy Medal and prize.



Acceptance speech by Lindsay E. Smith

I would like you to have a little understanding of how I came to be here today. I am a Naturalist I study wildlife as do many of my colleagues.

Since, I was a very young boy. I have been blessed with a fascination of the Natural World and a passion to share it with others. Southern Oceans Seabird Study Association. Is the organization I represent.

Lindsay Smith, Mr. Bob Debus, Patrick Medway, gentleman in front, unknown.
(Photographer Janice Jenkin-Smith)

Photo compliments of the Australian Wildlife Preservation Society. Members of SOSSA. L to R, Robert Thorne, Jackie Vrkic, Terrill Nordstrom, Lindsay Smith, Janice Jenkin-Smith, Carl Loves, John Boness

While it is not a true reflection of what we study, and what can offer advice on. I am often called on to advise on all manner of Natural History issues in the Illawarra region of New South Wales, Seals, Frogs, Reptiles, Fresh water Fish, Turtles Sea snakes, Marine Turtles, Whales and Dolphins.





Hump-backed whale (Photographer Darryl McKay, SOSSA)



Common Dolphin
(Photographer Brook Whyllie, SOSSA)

My interest in seabirds began at a very early age when my family lived in a tent on an estuary adjacent to an extensive ocean beach. This offered the opportunity to observe many species of seabirds, shorebirds and many other creatures found beach-washed on their shores, particularly after storms. It was not until I moved with my family to Western Australia many years later, that my interest in seabirds was rekindled and developed. The turning point for me was when I came across *The Handbook of Australasian Seabirds* by Dominic Serventy, Vincent Serventy and John Warham in 1971.

At last, I was able to identify many of the seabirds that I had encountered in my youth. I also learned that there were a far greater number of species of seabirds recorded in Australia than I could possibly have imagined. It was here too, that I first read of the Wandering Albatross; Doug Gibson and others catching and banding them; right where I had lived! On my return to the Illawarra I began studying the local breeding populations of sea and shore birds at the Five Islands Nature Reserve. These studies and more continue to this day.

It was here that I had the pleasure of meeting Doug Gibson and Harry Battam who introduced me to the New South Wales Albatross Study Group and the magnificent Wandering Albatross. I soon joined the banding project, which was initiated by Doug Gibson and others at Bellambi in 1956. Wandering albatrosses were the principle species studied, as they were plentiful and were far more easily captured than the smaller more agile species. Each year hundreds of Wandering albatrosses were drawn to the Illawarra in winter. The attraction was the annual post breeding die off of the Giant Cuttlefish *Sepia apama*. Whilst just to the north, at Malabar near Sydney, a sewage ocean outfall provided a constant supply of offal from the nearby Homebush abattoirs for 60 years!

In the early 1970s albatross numbers began to dwindle. No longer were the birds to be seen in their hundreds.

An initial decline was to be expected after the closure of the Malabar ocean outfall in 1969. However by the early 1990s' the birds had all but disappeared from inshore. In a normal season we could expect to capture over 100 individuals within 10 kilometers of shore. By the end of the century we were managing to catch fewer than ten individuals, for the entire season!

Something Was Seriously Wrong!



Wandering Albatrosses (Adult and Juvenile) (Photographer Darryl McKay, SOSSA)



Wandering Albatross (Adult and Juvenile) (Photographer Darryl McKay, SOSSA)



Malabar. 1956 (Photographer Peter Roberts)



Malabar. 1956? LA young Harry Battam, Albert T. Ross, Bill SG Lane, Richard Miller.

An initial clue to this dramatic decline came in 1991, when Nigel Brothers (Tasmania) published a paper on Albatross Mortality and Associated Bait Loss In The Japanese Longline Fishery In The Southern Ocean. He conservatively reported a by-catch rate of **0.4 birds / 1000 hooks set**. In the Japanese fishery alone. This accounted for **44,000 individuals per season!** Sixteen years later and “**Still They Die!**” The problem became perfectly clear. **Man was killing the birds faster than they could reproduce. They are on a Fast Track to extinction!**



Adult Male Wandering Albatross Shot! Adult Male and Female Wandering Albatrosses caught on Longlines
 Copyright Illawarra Mercury (Photographer Janice Jenkin-Smith, SOSSA)

Albatrosses are not the only by-catch of modern fisheries, just as Longline fishing practices are not the sole culprit associated with the demise of seabird numbers. There are many other factors and fisheries practices implicated by this decline. These include plastic ingestion, over-fishing of food resources, introduced pests and diseases, climate change. These are but a few of the problems that they are faced with.

Government agencies have responded to the problems of incidental by-catch of seabirds in pelagic fisheries by implementing a Threat Abatement Plan including a whole suite of mitigation measures. However the existence of mitigation measures does not always mean their implementation or compliance. Instead it is often a case of out of sight out of mind, business as usual.



Wandering Albatross (Adult Female) (Photographer Darryl McKay, SOSSA)

In January 2001 five Wandering albatrosses which had been caught on a longline (line still attached) were found washed ashore on the south coast of NSW. This unfortunate incident was reported to the Australian Fisheries Management Authority for attention.

In recent years members of SOSSA have been working with teams from The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels ACAP based in Hobart, Tasmania and the New Zealand Department of Conservation in an effort to deter seabirds from taking baits.



In 1984 the Wollongong Seabird Group began conducting regular pelagic trips to beyond the continental shelf, up to 30 nautical miles to sea off Wollongong. Initially these trips were intended to allow us to better understand the diversity and movements of seabirds and marine animals which occurred off our coast.

Southern Royal Albatross
(Photographer
Bill Moorhead, SOSSA)

Environment education

I believe by bringing interested people and many species of seabirds and marine animals face to face. We were successful in not only adding greatly to our knowledge but also in bringing attention to the plight of these wondrous creatures.



L to R David Geering, Bruce Cattle, Harry Battam with Wandering Albatross, Peter Milburn
(Photographer Darryl McKay, SOSSA)



Catching off Wollongong, R to L Lindsay Smith, Harry Battam
Janice Jenkin-Smith, Bill Buttemer
(Photographer Rory McGuinness, SOSSA)

“If wild animals and wild places are to survive into the future It is research based tourism that will give them economic value”

We are recognized internationally, not only by Scientists. People come from all over the world to Wollongong to view our magnificent seabirds and marine animals along with supporting our valuable research. Hopefully they will learn more about them and respect their importance to our environment. By working in pelagic waters and developing new strategies and techniques we were able to capture a far greater variety of albatrosses and petrels than we had been able to inshore. By capturing the birds at sea and on their breeding grounds simultaneously. We are gaining a greater insight into population structures and the health and diet of the birds at sea.

The latter has proven invaluable in advising Zoo's, Vets Wildlife Carers and Rehabilitators.

As part of our education program, we are distributing an educational kit about seabirds and other marine animals. Both Janice and I present talks and presentations to school children of all ages, Service Clubs and intuitions and basically anyone that will listen.

At SOSSA We Do What We Can!

In accepting this award.

**I would like to thank Bernie Clarke
for nominating me for this prestigious award.**

I would like to share, this great honor with my wife Janice Jenkin-Smith.OAM and long time colleague and mentor Harry Battam. Without the ongoing support, dedication and commitment of these, key people. SOSSA would not be where it is today.



Janice Jenkin-Smith with a Wandering Albatross
(Photographer Lindsay Smith SOSSA)
(Photographer Lindsay Smith SOSSA)



Members of SOSSA.
Janice Jenkin-Smith, Alby, Dr Peter Milburn

Enjoying the salmon entrée, John Boness, Robert Thorne, Harry Battam, Tony Cornell, Carl Loves
(Photographer Janice Jenkin-Smith)

To mention all the others I would like to thank would take all day. (I won't do that to you as you are probably anxious for me to get off!) BUT, (well, there's always a BUT!!) finally I would like to say that SOSSA is a registered, charitable, incorporated organization (NGO) with donations and tax deductibility we have been able to continue this increasingly important work for the environment, just because we love it!!

We have a wonderful network, many volunteers both in the field and behind the scenes who share my commitment to preserving all manner of Natural History.

I sincerely thank them all, the Field workers, Vets, Zoos, Aquariums WIRES, NANA, AWARE the Media, the list goes on and on and on. **(but I won't !)**

Thank you once again for this prestigious award today!!

Lindsay E. Smith OAM SOSSA – Vice President





Photo compliments of the Australian Wildlife Preservation Society.
Lindsay Smith

An Experience That Was To Change My Life Forever.

“There are few animals that have the Presence and Charisma of the Great Albatrosses”
I would like to convey to you, my initial encounter with the magnificent Wandering Albatross

There on the horizon silhouetted against the sky, it rose, high into the air. I could see it at 1000 yards, may be more. Glistening white in sun, growing larger as it bridged the gap between us. It came straight in. Just a few feet above our heads. So close that we could hear the rush of air as it passed over it's long narrow wings. It settled on the water not a hundred yards away to feed on a moribund cuttlefish.

A few minutes later this giant bird was settled in my lap. The temperament of this magnificent old “Snowy Albatross” was amazing, docile and placid showing no fear or aggression, despite having being captured only moments before. I was spell bound. We had no idea how old this bird was. It's brilliant white plumage indicated that it was very a old male. Maybe 60years or more! Where had it come from? How far had it traveled?



This image is the one used on the cover of the Australian Wildlife Magazine. Autumn 2/2007

Unfortunately it was incorrectly named on the cover (not by SOSSA)

Name Correction:

Campbell Island Albatross (*Thalassarche impavida*)

(Photographer Bill Moorhead, SOSSA)



Northern Royal Albatross



Southern Royal Albatross

(Photographer Brook Whyllie, SOSSA)

Great Albatross facts !

I needed to know more!

Did you know?

- Wandering and Royal albatrosses, have the most expansive wing spans of any bird. More than three meters.
- Most will not breed until 10-20 years of age. We still do not know how long they live. (no one has studied them long enough to know)
- They mate for life. If their partner dies, they may not attempt to breed again in their lives.
- They produce only a single egg once in two years. If the egg or chick is lost before it fledges no replacement is laid.
- Each individual has to live for at least 30years, just to replace itself in the population.
- They can travel over a thousand kilometers, just to find food for their chick.
- Their home range includes the whole of the “Great Southern Ocean”.
- 80% of their energy needs for flight, is provided by the wind and waves of the ocean.
- They regulate their body temperature by pumping blood through their feet and bills.

Just to finish off with a few extra images!!!



Juvenile Wandering Albatross
(Photographer Brook Whyllie, SOSSA)



Adult Female Wandering Albatross
(Photographer Darryl MacKay SOSSA).



Adult Female Wandering Albatross
(Photographer Lindsay Smith SOSSA).



Left to right (Photographer Robert Thorne SOSSA)
Lindsay Smith, Janice Jenkin-Smith, Carl Loves, John Boness



Photo compliments of the Australian Wildlife Preservation Society.
Terrill Nordstrom, Jackie Vrkic



(Photographer Carl Loves SOSSA)
Lindsay Smith, Peter Cundell, Janice Jenkin-Smith



Shy Albatross



Shy Albatross

(Photographer Brook Whyllie, SOSSA)



Shy Albatross
(Photographer Brook Whyllie, SOSSA)



Wandering Albatross
(Photographer Brook Whyllie, SOSSA)

The End