

Hon Kate Wilkinson

Minister of Conservation



29 October 2011

Media Statement

Dr Don Merton immortalised in new award

The achievements of world-renowned conservation innovator Dr Don Merton have been immortalised in an award that will see the continuation of his pioneering spirit in the management of endangered species, Minister of Conservation Kate Wilkinson announced today.

Announcing the award at special ceremony hosted by Rainbow Springs Kiwi Encounter in Rotorua, Ms Wilkinson praised the work of the former Department of Conservation scientist who died in April this year.

“Don was a world leader in his field and people looked to him for help in the recovery of threatened species. He was particularly good at innovative ideas that have brought back bird species from the brink of extinction.”

“His work with the South Island saddleback, the black robin and the kakapo were universally recognised as exceptional where management options had been severely limited.

“Today is extra special, as we not only get to announce this new award but also celebrate the 1000th kiwi chick to be bred at Rainbow Springs and release two chicks named Merton and Old Blue, in recognition of Don’s lasting legacy.”

The new Don Merton Conservation Pioneer Award will include a financial grant to a young researcher aged 30 or below who wants to get hands-on species management experience and use that experience to enhance their knowledge of how to tackle problems that continually confront conservation efforts.

“We want to celebrate and foster emerging conservation leadership among young people and increase their practical understanding of conservation in action,” says Ms Wilkinson.

“This award will provide financial support for the winner to travel and get the knowledge that will help to enhance local and global conservation.”

The award will be a highlight of the Australasian Parks Forum's programme to promote innovation and celebrates dedication and excellence in managing parks and communicating their environmental, social, cultural and economic values.

The Forum has an expanding international membership, which will provide future recipients of the award with a broad spectrum of opportunities.

The Don Merton Conservation Pioneer Award will be awarded every second year.

Nominations for the inaugural award open in December.

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“The Don Merton Conservation Pioneer Award.”

It has been observed that Don’s field notes are written as if they were a guide for future generations and it is this legacy the award represents.

- The award will symbolise the baton being handed from a wildlife pioneer to emerging leaders among the new generations of conservationists to increase the practical understanding of conservation in action.
- It will recognise a young person, up to the age of 30, who has demonstrated potential as a leader in the management of native wildlife. The award is for the individual, not a project *per se*.
- The winner will receive a monetary prize toward an exchange to a programme of his/her choice among the Australasian Parks Forum membership - currently New Zealand, Australia, England and Singapore, and expected to expand.
- Nominations will be called for this December for an award ceremony in May.
- The award will become part of the two-yearly Australasian Parks Forum award programme.