

New Fellows of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW: Dr Ayesha Tulloch FRZS

Dr Ayesha I. T. Tulloch was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW at the Society's Annual General Meeting in September 2021

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Australia is fortunate to have a cohort of brilliant early career scientists who are forging new ideas and approaches to conservation, and among the most outstanding of these is Dr Ayesha I. T. Tulloch. Ayesha's nomination as a Fellow of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW was supported unanimously by the Society Council. Describing herself as a conservation decision scientist, Ayesha is especially interested in building robust ecological knowledge and tools that address some of the most pressing challenges that we face: the challenges of maintaining and, where necessary, recovering biodiversity whilst maintaining the well-being of people in human-modified landscapes. She does this by combining rigorous fieldwork, desktop and benchtop analyses, ensuring that the results are disseminated in quality scientific journals and in more popular and accessible venues to ensure that her findings can be used by peers and by the broader community alike. Ayesha's vision is to influence and empower people to better understand their impacts on ecological systems and live more sustainably with the environment, achieving this through fostering better engagement between society and nature and informing and influencing policy and conservation decisions.

After a bachelor degree at the University of Sydney and first class Honours for research on the eastern pygmy-possum *Cercartetus nanus*, Ayesha took up varied positions with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, with Greening Australia, as a wildlife keeper, educator and student ambassador. She then took up a PhD at the University of Queensland, graduating in 2012 and going on subsequently to work as a postdoctoral fellow at UQ and then as a senior research fellow in the Fenner School at the Australian National University. She returned to the University of Sydney after winning an Australian Research Council (ARC) DECRA Fellowship, before moving north again to Queensland University of Technology with the award of a prestigious ARC Future Fellowship. Along the way she has written over 100 papers and reports, including in *Australian Zoologist*, supervised a couple of dozen Honours and higher degree research students and postdoctoral fellows. She has, in addition, contributed immensely to outreach activities in local communities, to citizen science and to a variety of national and international advisory committees, and has provided strong advocacy for LGBTQIA + scientists by helping to found the *Queers in Science* Queensland Chapter and serving on several equity, diversity and gender panels. Ayesha has also dedicated much time to undergraduate teaching; while this is unusual for many



In the field in central Australia: Ayesha Tulloch FRZS with a knob-tailed gecko (top), thorny devil (middle) and lesser hairy-footed dunnart (bottom). Photos: Chris Dickman

research fellows, this commitment aligns with her vision to ensure that society at large is aware of its impacts on, and its responsibility to, the natural environment. Ayesha also worked for short periods with the Wildlife Conservation Society on land-use planning projects in Africa and with the Australian Academy of Science on 'big data' in Australian research. She served for the last three years as Vice President of Policy and Outreach for the Ecological Society of Australia, a position that provided excellent opportunities for ensuring that high level advice was available to politicians and government departments.

Ayesha has garnered lots of awards. In 2018 she won the Next Generation Ecologist Award from the Ecological Society of Australia for her pioneering research on "Near-term and seasonal forecasting for managing ecological problems", and in 2021 she gained the prestigious NSW Tall Young Poppy of the Year Award.

Despite the pictures of her in this citation where she is holding various lizards and small mammals, Ayesha's main zoological passion and forte lie very much with birds. For many years she has been an active member of BirdLife Australia, and recently she has been the driving force behind the Threatened Species Index (TSX). Designed originally as a tool to help us visualise trends in the abundance of threatened birds, the TSX has been expanded to encompass threatened mammals and plants. The utility of this tool and its accessibility to anyone interested or concerned about the sustainability of human impacts on our native biota showcase Ayesha's ambition to (re)engage society with nature for the benefit of all.

It's a pleasure to welcome Ayesha very warmly as a new Fellow of the RZS NSW.

Chris Dickman, University of Sydney