



Media Release

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Physical celebrations argon... instead of overreacting, we held a virtual celebration

The Science Teachers Association NSW Young Scientist Awards culminated last night with the announcement of the Primary and Secondary Young Scientists of the Year and the team of 9 finalists who will be representing NSW and Australia in the International Science and Engineering Fair for 2021. These were the last of the 150+ prizes that were announced over the week to students from K-12 from across NSW.

The Science Teachers Association NSW congratulates all participants of the 2020 Young Scientist Awards. In what has been a difficult year we received we received 854 projects from across NSW.

President Margaret Shepherd said “COVID 19 tried to serve an ace but our team smashed a sideline winner - the number and calibre of entrants given the challenges faced by students and their teachers throughout the year were extraordinary - all students should be congratulated”

“There is no reason to think that some of our participants here in this competition could not be a Nobel Laureate” she said.

The winning project by Antonio Rajaratnam investigated the ‘thought to be extinct’ Sand Fairy cicada (*Sylphoides arenaria*). Having heard the cicada in 2019, the first time it had been heard in 100 years Antonio was driven to find it. His project saw him dedicate significant hours to the surveying of sand dune vegetation. Antonio this year managed to collect a sample and find out as much as he could about the species and deduce how this tiny cicada has survived the harsh environment and rapid urbanisation. Inhabiting beach dunes, it is thought to be under threat from rising sea levels and storm waves.

Ms Anjali Rao, Coordinator of the Science Teachers Association NSW Young Scientist program said “In addition to being the first person to hear the cicada, Antonio was the first person in 100 years to see, record and analyse this remarkable cicada and its interaction with the environment.”

Throughout the Presentation that was delivered online across the week, Young Scientists heard from eminent scientists, alumni, directors of research and our next Australian Chief Scientist Dr. Cathy Foley providing messages of congratulation and inspiration to continue developing their passion. The resounding message was ‘to keep asking questions - questions that haven’t been asked before’.

Ms Rao said "In a year when it was never more important to listen to and follow the advice and counsel of well informed scientists, our students demonstrated that they were critical thinkers, problem solvers and future leaders with their commitment to persevering with their STEM projects."

“This year projects ranged from “*My Marvellous Mucus Project*” to researching “*The effect of pH on RNA absorption and liberation on mineral surfaces*” and so many of them had a strong environmental concern at their core. This is truly authentic research which bodes well for the future of STEM in Australia.” said Ms Rao.

“So much excitement across the week - truly invigorating and so much hope in the future generations.” said Ms Shepherd.

Project descriptions are available here -

<http://www.youngscientist.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-Presentation-Ceremony-Booklet-with-Final-Results.pdf>

Examples of projects:

- Koala Saver Bot
- Fungi in Harold Reid Reserve
- Saving strawberries from spoilage
- Automated Mange Treatment for Wombats
- COVID-Tracker - Contact Tracing Device
- An exploration of the Fourier Transforms and its applications in music
- Stormwater -It Bugs me!

All presentations are available for viewing at <http://www.youngscientist.com.au/>

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