

# Young Nature Leaders Grant

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WOMEN FOR NATURE

Youth-Led Project Impacts



Women for Nature Members, 2017

# Introduction

All across Canada, people and organizations inspire us with their leadership and devotion to our natural world. They commit their time and energy not for credit but for the results. They choose to take up the call to protect, engage, and advocate on behalf of nature.

Women for Nature, an initiative of Nature Canada, gathers leaders who care deeply about nature and want to inspire others to make a difference. In particular, we want to encourage, foster, and nurture youth (under 30) to demonstrate their leadership for nature.

To that end, the Young Nature Leaders Grant was established in 2017. Each successful applicant receives \$1000 to develop and implement a project centered around promoting sustainability in Canada. To date, 42 young people have been awarded the Grant, each carrying out important and impactful projects.

This document compiles these stories, in the hopes of inspiring future generations of Young Nature Leaders to apply. Potential applicants can also check out the Nature Playbook to spark project ideas.



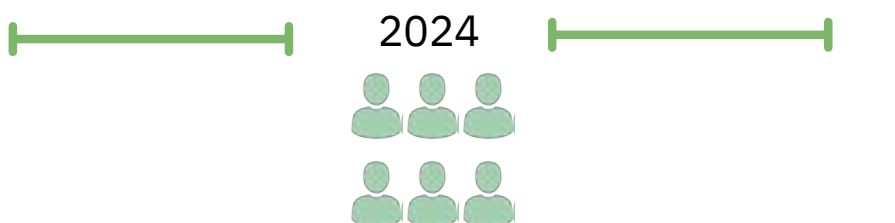
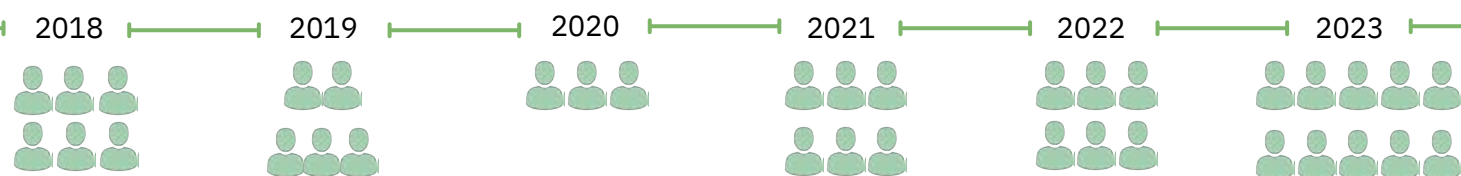
“ It brings me great hope and happiness to see these young people taking leadership in their local communities to help and heal nature. Through their actions and advocacy, young Canadians across the country are paving the way to a cleaner and brighter tomorrow. ”

The Honourable Rosa Galvez  
Honorary Chair of Women for Nature



# Past Youth-led Grants at a Glance...

To date, there have been **7** cohorts, totalling **42** recipients who



come from **10** different provinces and territories.



So far, **19** projects have actively focused on underrepresented groups. We strongly encourage Indigenous youth to apply, as well as youth from any racialized and/or underserved community. At the same time, we actively seek out projects that will purposefully engage members of such communities.



As of 2024, these youth-led projects have reached 5800+ Canadians in schools, universities, natural parks, community centres, and online.

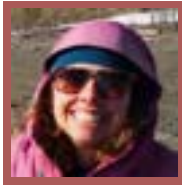


# 2018 Leaders

## Martha Henderson

Whitehorse, YK

Martha organized workshops with a Girl's Nature Club to empower teenage girls, aged 12-15, with the wilderness skills to help them become comfortable and confident with nature. They learned important outdoor skills like fire-building, orienteering, outdoor cooking, and trip planning.



## Chantal Templeman

Cochrane, AB

Chantal brought caving to youth by teaching them about bats and cave conservation. Participants built leadership skills while volunteering on projects in Banff National Park.



## Caroline Merner

Vancouver, BC

Caroline led interactive quick play sessions along the BC coast. This hands-on learning style connected young people with the unique coastal environment. Each participant was matched with a knowledgeable nature mentor.



## Mathilde Papillon

Ottawa, ON

Mathilde designed and built a Green Wall full of native plants for her school, with the goal of bringing nature to her school hallway.

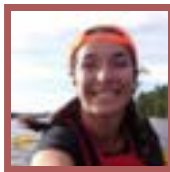
Today, it is used to teach ecology in science and biology classes.



## Nina Andrascik

Ottawa, ON

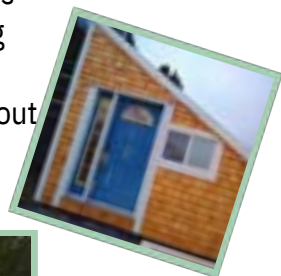
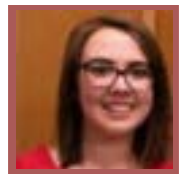
Nina piloted a project to encourage new Canadians to participate in outdoor nature activities which continued as a special club at her high school. She created a video series to document the participants' experiences and shared their experiences.



## Olivia DesRoches

Hampton, NB

Olivia and her Grade 11 Foundations of Math class built and ran a greenhouse at their school. Students continue to participate in cultivating fruits, vegetables, and flowers. The greenhouse also serves to teach about pollinators.



“I feel that everyone should feel the importance of protecting our heritage and enjoy the beauty of what was here long before any of us.”  
-Nina Andrascik

# 2019 Young Nature Leaders

## Dalal Hanna

Montreal, QC

Dalal is passionate about Canada's freshwaters. With the help of the YNL Grant, she co-led a science-centric rafting expedition in the Poisson Blanc Regional Park for 10 young women, aged 14-16. The mission? "Motivate and inspire young women to enjoy and protect fresh waters and the outdoors."



## Sammie Heard

Waterloo, ON

Sammie's project, Green Bellies, incentivized students to reduce single-use packaging in lunches at JW Gerth Public School. Students scanned a QR code each time they brought a litterless lunch. The class with the highest score was rewarded with a trip to The Huron Natural Area. She repeated the program in two other schools for even more impact.



## Kristin Muskratt

Curve Lake First Nation, ON



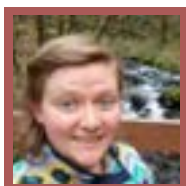
Kristin organized a Land-based Storytelling & Sharing Panel at Trent University to engage Indigenous youth through culture and Indigenous knowledge systems. She connected 50 youth to 4 Knowledge Holders, which, Kristin shared, is "a great way to help spark that inspiration to learn more about themselves and Mother Earth."



## Alison Nagy

Swift Current, SK

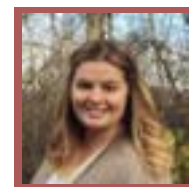
Alison designed and implemented an outdoor escape activity in the Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park. The program not only helped educate the public about the Park, but also engaged visitors in an exciting, high-energy way. There is no better way to learn!



## Alana Tollenaar

Spruce Grove, AB

In collaboration with the Edmonton and Area Land Trust, Alana hosted 8 Bee-The-Change workshops, during which over 100 participants built their very own bee hotels to set up back home. The funds were also used to assemble and distribute an extra 100 smaller construction kits for children.

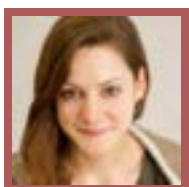


“Lots of people want to support nature conservation, but they don't have enough money or time to do it. Building bee hotels is a great way [for them] to help in their own backyards.”  
-Alana Tollenaar



# 2020 Young Nature Leaders

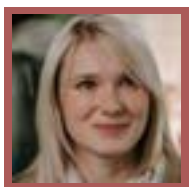
\*This cohort was smaller due to unanticipated restrictions imposed by the pandemic. All projects were carried out safely according to governmental regulations.



## Rachel Balderson

Ottawa, ON

For six weeks, Rachel ran digital workshops with local artist Emily Rose Michaud. The program engaged a group of young adults in nature journaling. During the virtual sessions, participants practiced basic drawing skills, mixing colours, and recording written details, such as water currents and species behaviour. Throughout the program, they undertook solitary time in the Ottawa River watershed to apply their new skills, observing and understanding the area's rich fauna and flora.



## Caitlin Brant

Niagara Falls, ON

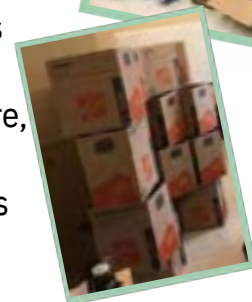
During a nationwide, fun-filled day of activities called Monarch Mayhem, Caitlin engaged approximately 1,600 students and 60 educators to become Pollinator Champions. Educators used Monarch Mayhem's tailored lessons to teach their students all about native pollinators, as well as how we can help them with pollinator gardens. In total, participants planted 2,450 sq. ft. of pollinator-friendly flora across Canada. The "Monarch March" pollinator awareness walk/run reached 2,180 km of its 4,000 km goal, which showed just how amazing the monarch migration is!



## Kirsten Reid

St John's, NL

Kristen assembled and distributed 80 "Forest-school-in-a-Box" boxes to kindergarten and preschool educators across Newfoundland and Labrador. Teachers and early childhood educators used these boxes as launchpads for their Forest School curriculum. This project encouraged rural youth across the province to access and love nature, eliminating barriers to outdoor, play-based learning. Boxes included items such as spoons to dig in the earth, paint brushes, picture cards of plants/birds/tracks to look for, twine, and tarps for creating shelters in the forest.

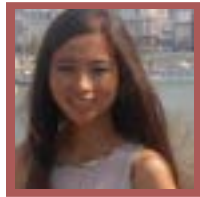


# 2021 Young Nature Leaders

## Leah Davidson

Sherbrooke, QC

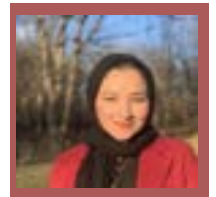
Leah integrated technology, environmental education and games to create an online environmental escape room that captured the attention of over 1200 youth in over 30 schools across Canada and the US. Her goal was to make learning about nature fun, positive and engaging.



## Iman Berry

London, ON

Through her non-profit Green Ummah, Iman created a Green Curriculum that taught students from grade 9-12 to take the lead on nature conservation and addressing climate change. Her curriculum promotes sustainable living, connects students to nature and spurs thoughtful dialogue about the environment within Muslim communities.



## Alana Norie

Squamish, BC

Alana launched an environmental stewardship program at Camp Querencia, BC.

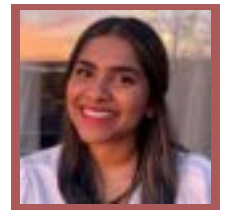
She inspired over 500 youth aged 3-15 to explore, learn and advocate for nature. Youth participated in activities such as plant identification games, nature problem solving, and exploring the diverse nature around them.



## Kareina D'Souza

Dartmouth, NS

Kareina organized a 5-month leadership and management training program, 'Women of Colour Leadership in Nature.' It provided an inclusive educational space for 15 young women of colour to connect with nature, build community and develop professionally. She helped foster a sense of leadership in women of colour through nature-based workshops and settings.



## Miranda Baksh

Brampton, ON

Miranda is preparing to execute a virtual field trip that will connect marginalized and BIPOC youth to nearby nature. Her field trip will empower youth often excluded from the climate justice movement to engage and advocate for the environment.



## Jessica Yu

Toronto, ON

Jessica is passionate about pollinators and inspiring youth to take action in their community. Leading her school district's "Bee the Change" project, she successfully assembled and distributed 65 pollinator garden kits at her school. This resulted in the planting of over 325 native pollinator plants around her community. Great impact!



“Let's bring the transformative power of nature to a new generation of BIPOC women leaders through professional development that builds community and a sense of belonging.”  
-Kareina D'Souza

# 2022 Young Nature Leaders

## **Kehkashan Basu** Toronto, ON



Through her non-profit Green Hope Foundation, Kehkashan ran environmental education programs and public awareness campaigns on the endangered Wood Turtle. She engaged students through inclusive and interactive workshops and field trips educating both students and the public on threats to the Wood Turtle and conservation strategies.



## **Rachel Irwin** Hamilton, ON

Rachel expanded the outreach of the Feminist Bird Club's Toronto chapter to promote diversity and inclusion in birding. The aim is to build an inclusive community of nature-lovers that have a safe space to discuss social and environmental justice while discovering nature!

### **Margaret Atwood Young Nature Leader Grant:**

## **Denise Miller**

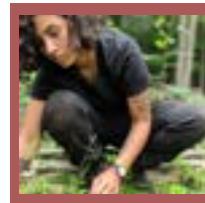
Six Nations of the Grand River Territory



Denise expanded her youth-led Revitalizing our Sustenance Project that addresses food security issues within her community. The project works to advance land and agricultural restoration and provides educational resources on Indigenous foods and local environmental issues. Denise shares that “as a Haudenosaunee woman, when you restore the land, you restore your identity and responsibility to Creation.”

## **Ana Castillo**

Grenville-Sur-La-Rouge, QC



Ana established a seed-keeping program at the Young Roots Farm summer camp to provide marginalized youth the opportunity to farm through hands-on learning and storytelling. A seeding and propagation space was built to facilitate education and seed-keeping knowledge. The program aims to strengthen youth's relationship with the land.

## **Nena Van de Wouwer** Bouctouche, NB



Nena launched a Green Godparent Program that engages community members to become stewards of local natural spaces. Nena also ran beach-cleanups and upcycled collected trash into artwork. Nena's hope? “If we all work together, we can protect our beautiful nature and preserve the biodiversity [...]!”

### **Graeme Gibson Young Nature Leader Grant:**

## **Kenzie McCallum**

Halifax, NS



Kenzie ran a three-part outdoor program for elementary school students. The program promoted outdoor education and climate change action through landmark experiences. Her program included climate change education and action-oriented projects such as water wise gardens.

“ I think as young people we need to step out of our comfort zones and take that extra step and walk that extra mile to get the future we want. Protecting our environment is no longer a choice, it's a responsibility. -Kehkashan Basu



# 2023 Clif Bar Young Nature Leaders

## Lauren Castelino

Toronto, ON

Lauren developed and led a 3-day hiking and camping excursion in Southern Ontario for young BIPOC women and newcomers to discover the outdoors. Her mission? “To bridge the gap between opportunity and access to nature, especially underrepresented youth.”



## Aranya Iyer

Mississauga ON

Aranya is the co-founder of Field Research in Ecology and Evolution Diversified (FREED) that leads nature workshops in Algonquin Park for BIPOC students. Aranya’s excursion welcomed new undergraduate students (FREEDlings) to experience camping, learn canoe skills, and engage in a variety of workshops that covered topics such as entomology, forestry, and aquatic ecology.



## Lauren Lawson

Toronto, ON

Lauren developed and ran a half-day workshop: Youth for BioDiverCities.

The workshop consisted of presentations, interactive hands-on experience using field equipment, and guided small table discussions about urban nature. Students shared their perceptions, barriers, and concerns, with the goal of understanding the importance of connecting with their local natural environments.



## Chevaun Toulouse

Sagamok First Nation, ON

Chevaun led land-based cultural programming in her First Nation community. Her programs consisted of identifying species at risk in the community, planting and teaching community members about cold-hardy gardens, as well as research to create Objibwe ecosystem name lists and resources to share with her own and many other First Nation communities and environmental organizations.



## Megan Turluk

Kelowna, BC

Megan organized day trips into South Okanagan National Park for international students attending the UBC Kelowna campus and connected them with Indigenous Elders who spoke about key natural places and their local culture.



“Growing up on Sagamok Anishnawbek gave me an interest in and respect for the natural environment. I explored my surroundings, becoming familiar with the plant and animal species that lived around me and in my community [...].

-Chevaun Toulouse

# 2023 Young Nature Leaders

## Brianna Barrett

St. John's, NL

Brianna created and distributed learning kits on local wildflowers and pollinators of Newfoundland for local schools, libraries, and youth programs in her hometown. Brianna's hope? "To engage others in protecting our native wildlife so that we can enjoy it for decades to come."



## Élise Laferrière

Hudson, QC

Élise developed and distributed a downloadable, bilingual, solutions-based curriculum about the human impact on birds for elementary school-aged students to educate them about how to save bird lives. Students will be able to learn about human-caused injuries as well as indirect causes of decline in wild bird populations.



## Jessica Lewis

Dartmouth, NS

Jessica developed an guided insect identification course for youth in urban areas of Nova Scotia. She was able to join the Young Naturalist Club and engaged kids in a variety of hands-on activities, such as a moth hunt at night, a blue light night walk to discover 'glowing' nocturnal creatures, and critter dipping in a nearby wetland.

## Kassidy Matheson

Murray Harbour, PEI

Kassidy hosted a series of workshops on native and invasive plants to engage her local community to learn about the plants that inhabit Prince Edward Island. The workshops focused on identification, marking, planting, and seed collection. The goal? To provide the community members the tools and knowledge they need to help them feel more connected to their community.



## Derek Nguyen

Ajax, ON

Derek's project focused on growing and distributing native Ontario pollinator plants to schools, shelters, and hospitals in the Durham Region and York Region. The impact of Derek's project was multifaceted: enhanced biodiversity, educational, psychological benefits, community engagement, and sustainable gardening practices.



“It took me a while to get to a space where I am comfortable in my interest in entomology, botany and ecology. [...] I aspire to create a world where kids can experience the happiness of flipping over rocks, catching bugs and counting ants too.”  
-Jessica Lewis



# 2024 Young Nature Leaders

## **Haley De Turse** *Peterborough, ON*



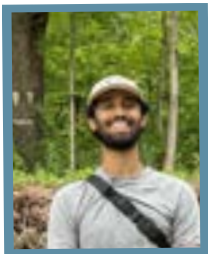
Haley led 53 outdoor education workshops as part of Sun School Project, engaging 1115 students through this work and collaborated with 15 organizations. She held bird conservation workshops in numerous schools in the Peterborough area. Students learned how they can help birds in their communities by making a

birdfeeder from recycled materials. More than 1000 bird feeders were created by the participants.



## **Humza Hassan** *Toronto, ON*

Humza hosted “Park and Trail Group Clean Up Days” with Muslim community members. This past fall, he engaged two grade nine classrooms of students to participate in two park hike and clean up days, the UWaterloo Muslim Student Association participated in a third event and the final hike and cleanup session involved participants from a local Waterloo mosque.



## **Percy Ager** *Cape Breton, NS*

This past Fall, Percy hosted a series of seed-saving workshops in their local community in Cape Breton. It is their hope to create a flourishing agro-tourism space that is accessible and inclusive bringing together diverse communities.



## **Samuel LeGresley** *Greater Moncton, NB*



Samuel has created a 101 Guide for Wildflower Seed Librarians, replicating a model that was started in Ottawa. The guide showcases 3 core principles: provide free access to native plant seeds, teach people about gardening responsibly, and ask seed recipients to reciprocate the gift of nature. He has established a seed library in Ottawa with plans to expand to Toronto next, and supports this work with a nature journal-style blog.

## **Luke Nguyen** *Ajax, ON*

Luke led a workshop to showcase native plant species and traditional Indigenous agricultural practices and over 30 youth volunteers were involved in the planting and maintenance of the Ajax's Indigenous Community & Healing Garden. Over the entire growing season, this special garden area welcomed hundreds of visitors at the local hospital and community members from the Town of Ajax, and surrounding communities.



## **Abinaya Gnanasekar** *Oakville, ON*

This past August, Abinaya hosted an one-day outdoor nature field trip to Kortright Centre for Conservation located in Vaughan, ON with 20 newcomers/refugee women, in partnership with York University and Regenesis.

