

For immediate release:
August 15, 2023 at 6:00 am ET

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Action For Nature Announces 2023 International Young Eco-Hero Award Winners

17 Eco-Conscious Youth from Around the World Honored for Environmental Achievements

San Francisco – Today, Action For Nature (AFN) announced its 2023 International Young Eco-Hero Award winners, honoring seventeen young environmental activists from across the globe for their creative initiatives to tackle the world's most pressing environmental challenges.

The International Young Eco-Hero Awards honors global youth ages 8 to 16 whose work has had a significant impact on raising awareness of environmental issues and finding innovative solutions to tough environmental problems.

"From bustling metropolises to remote villages, these young luminaries are sparking a green revolution that knows no bounds," said Beryl Kay, president of Action for Nature. "Their ingenious projects are tangible, impactful solutions that are leaving indelible marks on their communities and the world."

Since 2023, Action For Nature has recognized 339 Eco-Heroes from 27 countries and 32 U.S. states. The winning projects are selected by a panel of independent judges, including experts in environmental science, biology, and education.

"In a world thirsting for hope, these young people are a beacon of change, illuminating a path toward a greener, sustainable, and hopeful future," said Kay. "The projects crafted by these young eco-warriors are inspiring all generations to join forces and lend a helping hand."

The winners will present their work at a virtual event anchored in San Francisco on August 26 at 10 am PST live via Zoom Webinar. For more information about the 2023 Eco-Hero Conference, including how to attend, email laila@actionfornature.org.

This year's International Young Eco-Hero Awards go to:

First Place (8-12 Year-old Category): **Eiha Dixit – Age 9 – Meirut, India**

Since the age of four, Eiha has been growing saplings to protect the environment. Through the Green Eiha Smile Foundation, she and a group of volunteers have planted over 20,000 saplings, creating mini forests, parks, and green belts in her Indian city, providing shade and cleaner air. Eiha also established a plant bank at her home, using plants donated by people who can no longer care for them. These plants are used to obtain cuttings and seeds, and other people may take these plants free of charge.

First Place (13-16 Year-old Category): **Charlotte Michaluk – Age 16 – Titusville, NJ, United States**

As a young sailor, Charlotte noticed changes to her beloved marshes over the years, including loss of species and native plants. Normally, wetlands absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, but due to climate change, wetlands might start releasing more carbon dioxide instead of absorbing it. Charlotte designed a special coating for ship hulls, inspired by shark skin, which makes ships more efficient by reducing resistance and the growth of harmful organisms on the ship's surface. She also developed a concept for a cargo ship that uses both wind and fossil fuels for power. If these ideas are adopted and applied to the global cargo shipping fleet, it could have a very significant positive impact on the environment, on par to taking 7.5 million cars off the road.

Second Place (8-12 Year-old Category): **Manya Harsha – Age 12 – Bangalore, India**

Manya, a 12-year-old poet and writer, has embarked on a mission to raise awareness about environmental issues and climate action. Through her books, blog, and YouTube channel, The Little Environmentalist, she aims to inspire youth to take action and become environmentally conscious. Manya engages in various activities such as walkathons, planting saplings, distributing seed balls, and organizing clean-up drives to make a positive impact on the environment. With over 5,000 sustainable bags distributed, 3,500 saplings planted, and 3,000 seed bombs thrown, she continues to work tirelessly to create a better future for the coming generations and to protect the earth for all.

Second Place (13-16 Year-old Category): **Michelle Song – Age 15 – Greenville, NC, United States**

Michelle started Community for Environmental Sustainability (CFES) as a student-led initiative under Love a Sea Turtle (LAST) nonprofit to address food insecurity and environmental issues in her community. CFES links several student-led programs to tackle environmental and social justice problems through advocacy, education, and volunteer service, including the creation of community gardens and orchards. Through CFES, Michelle and her team have donated over 4,500 pounds of fresh produce to those in need, engaged 1,000 volunteers each year, and have inspired activism and legislation.

Second Place (13-16 Year-old Category): **Nirvaan Somani – Age 16 – New Delhi, India**

Nirvaan founded Project Jeans to tackle the environmental impact of the fashion industry, specifically the waste caused by discarded denim, while also addressing the needs of the underprivileged. He repurposes used jeans into washable and insulating sleeping bags for the homeless, reducing landfill waste and providing better protection from harsh weather conditions. With 6,000 pairs of jeans collected and 800 sleeping bags distributed to date, Nirvaan's initiative has made a positive impact on both the environment and the lives of those in need.

Second Place (13-16 Year-old Category): **Kaitlyn Culbert – Age 16 – Toms River, NJ, United States**

Kaitlyn started Honey Bee & Pollinator Health: Scientific Innovation and Outreach to combat the Varroa mite, a major threat to honey bees, by using a cost-effective and environmentally friendly solution involving continuous-release mist diffusion of thymol-based essential oils. Her research findings have been published and presented

at various conferences, raising awareness about the importance of honeybees in the ecosystem. Additionally, Kaitlyn actively engages her community through establishing pollinator gardens, documenting her beekeeping journey on YouTube, and educating the public about the critical role of bees in our environment and society.

Third Place (13-16 Year-old Category): **Ethan Hua – Age 14 – San Mateo, CA, United States**

Ethan launched the H.O.P.E. (Help Our Planet Earth) Uniforms Program to address the issue of textile waste and to provide a solution for students in need. By collecting gently-used school uniforms and redistributing them to students, H.O.P.E. creates an eco-friendly cycle, reducing landfill waste and greenhouse gas emissions. So far, Ethan has implemented H.O.P.E. in several schools, has collected 4,700 donated clothing articles and has provided free uniforms to more than 550 families.

Third Place (13-16 Year-old Category): **Satvika Iyer – Age 15 – Milpitas, CA, United States**

Satvika's project aims to create a healthy and sustainable food system in schools by advocating for more plant-based nutrition and better waste management. She successfully worked with various organizations and her school district to introduce a permanent plant-based menu with meat-free alternatives and salad bars. Additionally, she lobbied Congress to include provisions promoting plant-based meals in the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act. Satvika's efforts have made a significant impact on school nutrition – her high school has already served more than 5,000 plant-based meals – and she plans to continue her work by helping other school districts implement sustainable food systems.

Third Place (13-16 Year-old Category): **Mannat Kaur – Age 15 – New Delhi, India**

Mannat's project aims to address water scarcity and carbon emissions associated with freshwater supply and wastewater treatment. Mannat has designed a system to collect, filter, and reuse greywater from households for non-potable purposes, thus conserving precious drinking water. The impact of her invention goes beyond individual households, and could potentially save thousands of liters of fresh water daily and reduce operational and infrastructure costs for the city's sewage treatment.

Third Place (13-16 Year-old Category): **Colin Chu – Age 15 – Palo Alto, CA, United States**

Colin discovered that his own school discards more than 100 safe, nutritious extra meals each day, while just 12 miles away in San Francisco 1 in 4 people are food insecure. Colin's project, Homeless Heroes, tackles both environmental justice and social justice issues by addressing food waste in schools and food insecurity among the unhoused. Homeless Heroes delivers thousands of meals that would have otherwise gone to waste to homeless shelters, providing high-quality, nutritious food to those in need. Additionally, Colin educates the community about homelessness by sharing interviews and life stories of homeless individuals, bringing attention to their experiences and challenges.

This year's special honors go to:

*Dr. Mary Griffin-Jones Award: **Leo Sordello-Savale – Age 8 – London, England***

Leo's Animal Planet is a YouTube channel that features original, humorous, and educational videos about a wide array of animals, from sharks to bees. Leo's project aims to raise awareness about endangered species and climate change and to inspire young people worldwide to protect nature and wildlife. His videos have already had a significant impact: not only are they used in schools to educate children about animal conservation, the videos have also attracted nearly 100,000 views online.

*Shimon Schwarzschild Award: **Steven Hoffen – Age 14 – New York, NY, United States***

Steven founded Growing Peace Inc., a nonprofit organization that delivers modern agricultural technology solutions to underserved and disadvantaged communities. The organization deploys hydroponic growing systems – a way to produce fresh and healthy produce more efficiently – at targeted locations. He has developed, installed, and brought on line three hydroponic systems – one at a food pantry for Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers in Tel Aviv and two in New York City.

Young people receiving honorable mentions include:

*Honorable Mention: **Karnav Rastogi – Age 13 – Mumbai, India***

Karnav is committed to raising awareness about and taking action to reduce plastic waste and combat climate change. He wrote two books, “Kartik, Daddy & Plastic: A journey about beating plastic pollution” and “Kartik, Mixie & Monster: A journey about ocean pollution,” to educate young people about the impact of plastic pollution and climate change, providing solutions to tackle these issues. To date, he has distributed 5,000 copies of his book, and has inspired countless young people to become champions of change.

*Honorable Mention: **Genesis Butler – Age 16 – Long Beach, CA, United States***

During the COVID-19 pandemic when attending protests wasn't an option, Genesis founded Youth Climate Save – an online youth organizing space – in order to stay engaged in activism and to address the impact of animal agriculture on climate change. With 73 chapters in 22 countries, the youth-led movement promotes plant-based diets to save animals and create a healthier environment.

*Honorable Mention: **Rahul Vijayan – Age 16 – Pearland, TX, United States***

Rahul founded Farm to Tray to improve access to fresh, green organic produce in schools in Houston and beyond by introducing on-site hydroponic farming, an efficient water-based gardening technique that works well in urban environments. Rahul educates elementary and middle school students in his school district about sustainable gardening, and also provides them with microgreen kits for hands-on plant-growing experiences. Following its success in Texas, the project has already expanded to schools in California and New York.

*Honorable Mention: **Nitya Jakka – Age 16 – Naperville, IL, United States***

Nitya, a passionate social and environmental activist, developed Terraclu, a website and

sensor system that addresses the issue of food waste through better climate-controlled transportation and storage. Terraclu predicts ethylene output levels of crops and recommends optimal temperature and humidity levels to ensure they are delivered at ideal ripeness while optimizing energy use. Nitya aims to move beyond the development phase and to bring Terraclu to market next year.

*Honorable Mention: **Anushka Godambe – Age 16 – Austin, TX, United States***

Anushka founded Plants in Classrooms to foster a love of gardening in K-12 students by teaching them to care for a classroom plant through practice, patience, and teamwork, as they grow a love for horticulture. The 1,000 plants spread across Austin's Eanes Independent School District are in traditional classrooms, administration and counseling offices, cafeterias, and school libraries. Anushka aims to extend Plants in Classrooms to other neighboring school districts in the coming year.

To learn more about the Young Eco-Hero Awards and this year's winners, read about all of their projects, access high-res images, and view the winners' project videos, visit <https://actionfornature.org/eco-hero-awards/2023-winners>.

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Action For Nature. (AFN) is an international non-profit organization based in San Francisco, California, that encourages young people to nurture a love and respect for Earth's natural resources and to take personal action to protect the environment.