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## **Action For Nature Announces 2021 “International Young Eco-Hero Award” Winners**

### ***25 Eco-Conscious Youth from Around the World Honored for Environmental Achievements***

San Francisco – Today, Action For Nature (AFN) announced its 2021 Young Eco-Hero award winners, honoring 25 young environmental activists from across the globe for their creative initiatives aimed at tackling the world’s most pressing environmental challenges.

For the past eighteen years, the International Young Eco-Hero Awards have annually honored global youth ages 8 to 16 who are taking crucial steps to solve tough environmental problems.

“The next generation of leaders is here, and they are refusing to wait to solve the most pressing environmental challenges,” said Beryl Kay, president of Action For Nature, an international non-profit organization that encourages young people to nurture a love and respect for the Earth and to take personal action to improve the environment. “The projects that these young people created will not only have real, positive impacts on their communities, they will also help solve global climate challenges and inspire others – no matter what age – to consider what they can do to help.”

Since 2003, Action For Nature has recognized more than 300 Eco-Heroes from over 30 countries and 25 U.S. states. The winning projects are selected by a panel of independent judges, including experts in environmental science, biology, and education.

“I am so inspired by the hard work, dedication, and optimism of these young climate activists who show us that we are in the fight to save our planet together, and the time to act is now,” said Kay.

The winners will present their work at a virtual event, the 2021 International Eco-Hero Awards Conference, anchored in San Francisco on September 18, 2021, at 10 AM Pacific Standard Time and shared live via Zoom. For more information about how to attend and to RSVP email [holly.shulman@gmail.com](mailto:holly.shulman@gmail.com).

#### ***This year’s International Young Eco-Hero Awards go to:***

##### **First Prize – Mallayka Ianna Oddenyo** (age 12, Kisumu, Kenya)

Mallayka Ianna started collecting plastic waste at eight years old after a disturbing experience – seeing a dead fish floating in a nearby lake with its head stuck inside a plastic bottle – made her aware of the plastic pollution crisis. Now, she collects and recycles plastic waste into useful items like flower vases, picture frames, table mats, face masks, hand bags and pencil holders, educates the community about reducing plastic waste, and mobilizes other young people to collect plastic pollution and turn it into useful items, thus preventing the plastic from making its way into oceans, lakes, and waterways.

##### **First Prize – Aarushi Wadhwa** (age 16, San Jose, California)

Aarushi Wadhwa has long sought out opportunities to save our planet. With Aqua-Pods, she addresses one of the biggest drivers of water waste globally: the overwatering of plants. Since 2017, Aarushi has been developing an Aqua-Pod – a “sponge” made of 100% biodegradable materials such as coffee grounds, potato, and banana peels that are proven to retain water and increase soil fertility. Currently, the Aqua-Pod is being distributed in California, as well as in Kenya and India.

##### **Innovator Award – Kyle Tianshi** (age 14, San Diego, California)

Being immigrants from China, Kyle’s parents didn’t have clean, filtered drinking water when they grew up, so they never let him drink tap water. Curious about why they were so concerned, he started to research water

pollution and learned that officials in his home state of California are in the process of adopting a standardized testing method for monitoring microplastics in drinking water. However, measuring microscopic particles in water is expensive, making it inaccessible for many families. Determined to find an affordable and scalable solution, Kyle invented NEREID, a patent pending, portable microscopic particle detector that can rapidly find microplastics in water using a laser. This solution offers a low-cost alternative for families that do not have access to water filtration systems.

**Climate Change Activist – Sophia Mathur** (age 13, Sudbury, Canada)

Inspired by her family, Sophia began lobbying politicians on environmental issues at age seven. She has successfully lobbied the City of Greater Sudbury to declare a climate emergency, urged Canadian Ministers to adopt carbon pricing, and lobbied her MP, Paul Lefebvre, for border carbon adjustments. Currently, Sophia is the lead youth plaintiff in an Ecojustice lawsuit against the Ontario government for weakening Ontario's 2030 climate target. And during the COVID-19 pandemic she has hosted virtual events with MPs, MPPs, Senators and has asked Prime Minister Trudeau and Deputy PM Chrystia Freeland direct questions about their climate plans.

**Second Prize – Cherry Sung** (age 14, Seoul, South Korea)

In 2018, Cherry suffered from severe anorexia nervosa and was hospitalized for three weeks. During that time, her only source of outside information was television documentaries – most of them about the environment and threats like plastic pollution, wildfires, and climate change – and Cherry reached a tipping point. In response, Cherry Sung started Greener is Cleaner, a youth-led organization focused on three specific areas to create change: economic markets, public policies, and citizen action. Since March 2020, Cherry's organization has successfully convinced organizations – from beverage companies to her own high school – to eliminate the use of plastic and switch to biodegradable materials.

**Second Prize – John Abad** (age 16, Lima, Peru)

John Abad lives in Lima, a city on Peru's coastline, and is deeply concerned about plastic pollution in the ocean. Hearing that none of the candidates for mayor of Lima presented any proposals for ocean protection, he decided to act. In 2019, he began his campaign "No Plastic on my Beach," and founded the nonprofit Save Our Planet. Working with other nonprofits, such as the Ocean Heroes Network and the Oceanic Conservancy, John recruited 2,300 volunteers from businesses, schools, churches, and other community organizations to participate in large beach cleanups.

**Second Prize – Tanya Das** (age 16, Mount Laurel, New Jersey)

Tanya Das founded the global non-profit, Motion for the Ocean, Inc., to raise awareness about marine debris and to empower and inspire underserved youth by teaching them underwater robotics that they could apply to pollution removal. In January 2020, Tanya conducted her first international underwater robotics workshop in an Indian village in the state of Odisha. More than 450 people attended the workshop's opening assembly, and 250 students participated in the 10-day workshop which culminated in the students successfully using their remotely operated vehicles to remove debris from the local river. The COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed Tanya's ability to continue in-person robotics workshops, but she continues to provide virtual leadership training and support to more than 30 student ambassadors in 12 countries.

**Third Prize – Ayaan Shankta** (age 12, Mumbai, India)

Ayaan Shankta lives near a lake that used to be a source of drinking water for Mumbai, but has become a dumping ground for garbage and sewage. Ayaan's project, Conservation and Rehabilitation of Powai Lake, aims to raise awareness about pollution, clean up the lake, and protect its ecosystem. In addition to working with NGOs to raise awareness and organize clean-ups, Ayaan authored an action report on lake conditions and is currently working on a documentary about Powai Lake.

**Third Prize – Jacobo Rendón** (age 13, Antioquia, Colombia)

Jacobo Rendón lives in El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia, a region known for its natural beauty and its many diverse birds. After the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Jacobo decided to make an illustrated and photographic guide for his community to raise awareness about the diversity of birds in El Carmen de Viboral and the importance of preserving them.

**Third Prize – Luna Abadia** (age 16, Portland, Oregon)

Luna Abadia was concerned about climate change from a young age, and while studying abroad in Japan as a Rotary Youth Exchange Ambassador, she noticed differences in how people approached environmental issues and became aware that for a solution to be effective, it needed to be global. When she returned home, Luna decided to start the Effective Climate Action Project, which facilitates free, climate simulation workshops to inspire others to advocate for ambitious environmental action. These workshops utilize computer models designed by MIT and Climate Interactive to analyze how different climate solutions and policy measures – such as renewable energy, afforestation, industry electrification, and carbon pricing impact our current trajectory of global warming – allowing participants to see how their own ideas about how to solve climate change would affect aspects of Earth’s climate system.

**Third Prize – Amelia Fortgang** (age 16, San Francisco, California)

Amelia Fortgang founded the Bay Area Youth Climate Summit (BAYCS), an activism network that was born out of a need for impactful climate mobilization during the COVID-19 pandemic. In September 2020, BAYCS organized a day-long virtual summit that united 280 young people from 88 schools, 14 states, and 5 countries. The agenda included 16 workshops ranging from coral reef protection to climate justice activism to environmental entrepreneurship. Since the summit, BAYCS has continued running monthly in-depth workshops on topics including air quality, Indigenous activism, and environmental justice that have attracted more than 950 participants.

**Third Prize – Karina Samuel** (age 16, Coral Springs, Florida)

Karina Samuel is the CEO and founder of the Florida chapter of Bye Bye Plastic Bags (BBPBF), a nonprofit working to pass pro-environment reform, ban plastic bags, clean-up pollution, and raise awareness about climate change. BBPBF has hosted 30 drive-through voter registration campaigns, organized 10 strikes in Miami, and held 12 virtual conferences with pro-environment political candidates across the state of Florida. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, BBPBF hosted clean-ups that attracted more than 1,000 volunteers over the past two years.

***The following young people received honorable mentions in this year’s competition:***

- **Romario Valentine** (age 9, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa)
- **Nihal Tammana** (age 11, Edison, New Jersey)
- **Nithin Parthasarathy** (age 16, Irvine, California)
- **Dylan D’Agate** (age 16, Melville, New York)
- **Luis Alberto May Cuai** (age 16, Yucatán, México)
- **Ashwin Sivakumar** (age 16, Pasadena, California)
- **Romal Mitr** (age 15, Dublin, California)
- **Avni Garg** (age 16, New York, New York)

***The following young people received notable mentions in this year’s competition:***

- **Jacklyn Vandermel** (age 16, Closter, New Jersey)
- **Nileena Mariam Jonesh** (age 8, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)
- **Miles Fetherston-Resch** (age 8, St. Petersburg, Florida)
- **Ganesh Kumar** (age 15, Fremont, California)
- **Jack Dalton** (age 10, Manchester, New Hampshire)

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 [www.actionfornature.org](http://www.actionfornature.org).

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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 better their environments.