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University of Sydney Student Awarded \$6,850 for Conservation Research

PhD candidate Sarsha Gorissen of the University of Sydney was recently announced as the recipient of a \$6,850 science grant from Humane Society International.

Each year, grants of up to \$7,000 are offered by three partnering conservation organisations for research that will have significant outcomes for Australian conservation. Postgraduate students and Early Career Researchers (within 3 years of completing a PhD) are eligible to apply.

These awarding organisations are the Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife, the Paddy Pallin Foundation and Humane Society International. The grants are administered by the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales.

Ms Gorissen is researching the little-known Blue Mountains Water Skink, *Eulamprus leuraensis*.

"This lizard is found only within the endangered highland swamps of the Blue Mountains and the adjacent Newnes Plateau," said Ms Gorissen, grant winner.

"This endangered lizard is restricted to about 40 isolated swamps, most of them small, fragmented and close to urban areas," Ms Gorissen said.

Ms Gorissen said, "This unique habitat type is threatened on a local scale by urbanisation, weed invasion, introduced animals, forestry and mining."

"It is also threatened on a landscape scale by changes in climate and in fire regimes. In particular, the effects of fire on the Blue Mountains Water Skink remain unknown," Ms Gorissen said.

"My PhD research project aims to produce guidelines for more effective management of the endangered swamp ecosystem," said Ms Gorissen.

"It will show how the threatened species in this system are likely to respond to threatening processes, especially to alterations in fire regimes," Ms Gorissen said.

Ms Gorissen added, "It will also clarify the ecology of the distinctive biotic assemblages that rely upon these swamps, with a focus on the Blue Mountains Water Skink."

Mr Michael Kennedy, Director of Humane Society International, said "On behalf of the grant program partners, we are proud to support Sarsha's research. As she has identified, we urgently need to know more about this unique threatened species if we are to protect it from extinction."

Of the science grant program Mr Kennedy said, "This program is highly successful in encouraging different not-for-profits to work together to help achieve our joint vision for the conservation of Australia's unique species."

Humane Society International (HSI) concentrates on the preservation of endangered animals and ecosystems and works to ensure quality of life for all animals, both domestic and wild. HSI is the

largest animal protection not-for-profit organisation in the world, with over 12 million supporters globally and has been established in Australia since 1994. To find out more visit www.hsi.org.au.

The next round of science grants for PhD and Early Career Researchers will open in May 2014. Visit www.rzsnsw.org.au for details.

For further information and to arrange a potential photo opportunity:

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