

What a hoot: The adventures of Australia's youngest scientist

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Grace Fulton, at age six, is possibly Australia's youngest published scientist.
Credit: University of Queensland

At just six, Grace Fulton is possibly Australia's youngest scientist, participating in field research to help protect precious owl species.

Since the age of four, Grace has been joining her father, University of Queensland scientist Graham Fulton, capturing critical data about owl species, including powerful, southern boobook, sooty and masked owls.

Mr Fulton said he is delighted his daughter is so passionate about

protecting these birds, and she loves being immersed in nature.

"Grace absolutely adores owls," he said.

"She was only four when she started spending nights with me in the rainforest searching for them, and now she knows all of their calls.

"Since then she's been travelling across the country collecting data about what and where these birds are and what's happening to their populations as habitats decline.

"She's even a lead author in a [research article](#) in a published peer-reviewed [scientific journal](#)."

Grace's most recent research was conducted at two sites, one close to her home in suburban Brisbane, and the other in the rainforests of Mount Glorious, outside the city.

"Grace and I were keen to compare how forest owls and other [nocturnal birds](#) do in dense urban areas compared to leafy, wild places like Mount Glorious," Mr Fulton said.



Credit: University of Queensland

"It came as no surprise that there was a distinct lack of owls in the Brisbane suburb—the habitat is just so poor for owls when compared to Mount Glorious's lush rainforest.

"We really need bigger reserves with [old trees](#) in Brisbane's suburbs, which are better connected and have no dogs and cats, so they can support owls and plenty of other forest species."

Despite her scientific focus on owls, Ms Fulton is inquisitive about all sorts of [species](#).

"Snakes are really close to her heart—she doesn't see them as bad, and definitely isn't afraid to touch them," Mr Fulton said.

"And right now she's absolutely fascinated by the migration of butterflies across Brisbane.

"We also like to play with leeches as she thinks they're cute!

"Ever since she was two-years-old she's never stopped asking why, and I'm thrilled to help foster her curiosity about the natural world."

The research has been published in *Pacific Conservation Biology*.

More information: Graham R. Fulton et al. A comparison of urban and peri-urban/hinterland nocturnal birds at Brisbane, Australia, *Pacific Conservation Biology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1071/PC19042](https://doi.org/10.1071/PC19042)

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