

Gil Hartwig - Order of Australia medal winner

by senior correspondent Jennifer Martens



Gil Hartwig was named in the Queen's Birthday Honour List for his services to the environment through conservation activities, particularly feral animal control, and to the sport of shooting. Photo by Chris Walls, Newspix.

For most Australians, the Queen's Birthday is a day to spend with family and friends and enjoy an extra day off work. For a select few, it is a day when they are honoured with one of the 53 awards within Australia's system of honours and awards.

This year, Gil Hartwig was awarded the Order of Australia, the highest honour, for his service to the environment through conservation activities, particularly feral animal control, and to the sport of shooting.

"I was pretty surprised when I got the letter that said I had been nominated," said Gil, a member of the SSAA for more than 40 years. "I read it several times and had to pinch myself to make sure I was awake."

Since the news of his award was made public, he's given a number of interviews and has received congratulatory letters from the Governor of South Australia, Marjorie Jackson-Nelson, and the SA Premier Mike Rann.

The honours system was established in 1975 and has since recognised more than 240,000 Australians. The Order of Australia is the most prestigious award. Winners are nominated by either members of the community or the military. Their nominations go to the Honours Secretariat at Government House in Canberra. Those that make

the cut are then forwarded to the Council for the Order of Australia. The Council submits its recommendations to the Governor-General for final approval. This process can take months.

Gil's award was years in the making. From 1968 to 1972, he was SSAA South Australia's Treasurer. He spent 19 years at SSAA Para Range in various capacities, including four years as both Vice President and President. During this time he was also the SA State Vice President for five years and President for three. He was awarded State Life Membership in 1982.

Throughout the years Gil has dabbled in many forms of shooting, including ISU Pistol, Shotgun and Benchrest. However, in the early years most of his attention, and competitive success, was found in Field Rifle and 3-Positional Scoped Rifle. From 1975 until 1990, he was among Australia's top 10 shooters. He won the 4-Gun Grand Aggregate (Rimfire and Centrefire Field Rifle and 3P) in 1976, 1978 and 1979 and was the third inductee into the Field Rifle Hall of Fame.

While at Para he was also the Running Target captain for five years and represented SA in the National Championships in 1974. He served as the National Coaching Director for eight years.

While his accomplishments in Running Target were notable, his talents as an official were exceptional. In addition to serving in many other capacities, Gil successfully ran the Olympic selection trial in 1980 and the State and National Titles many times. He was also a Running Target coach, technical director, world cup official, A-Grade judge, 'Chief of Range' for the Sydney Olympics and was a member of the Jury of Appeal for the 2004 World Cup.

In 2000, Gil was awarded an Australia Sports Medal for his services to the shooting sports as a competitor and official, as well as his efforts in the area of conservation. His dedication to feral animal control began in 1991 and saw him begin the Hunting & Conservation Branch in SA. He was awarded life membership of the H&C Branch (SA) in September 2001.

Gil has been president of the Yellow-Footed Rock Wallaby Preservation Association (Inc) since its inception in 1997. The association purchased and manages 34,000 acres in the Flinders Ranges called Bunkers Conservation Reserve. Its efforts have resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of endangered yellow-footed rock wallabies.

Gil's Order of Australia medal was given in recognition for his ground-breaking efforts with both of these conservation groups and for his tireless commitment to the shooting sports.

He shares this passion with his wife, Marlene, who has worked for the SSAA Inc for the past 18 years, nine of which have been as the National Secretariat. Having been by Gil's side for more than 42 years and been witness to his many accomplishments in and outside of the shooting sports, she'll watch proudly as he is officially presented his Order of Australia medal this spring at Government House in Adelaide.

Congratulations, Gil. The SSAA is proud to call you one of its own. ●