

Olivia is an eco-hero

Lauren Boyle Walford

OLIVIA Taylor is extremely passionate about the environment.

The 15-year-old has started her own NPO and during the recent school holidays, climbed Mount Kilimanjaro to raise funds for her projects.

She also recently won an International Young Eco-Hero award through Action For Nature. She was honoured for fundraising to save South Africa's bearded vultures. Olivia raised more than R70 000 and created two high quality websites to save the endangered bearded vultures and launch her new conservation venture, *Four Elements Conservation*.

It was after discovering Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife's Bearded Vulture Project when she was 11 years old, that Olivia was first inspired to raise funds to track the lives of these precious birds.

"I have been interested in conservation from the age of 10. My teacher, Sue Walker, asked if I would like to join her in bird watching one day. I wanted to say no, but I went, which was the start of everything," said Olivia.

Olivia met a leading ornithologist on the birding trip who introduced her to a rare bird, the bearded vulture. She got involved with KZN Ezemvelo and started fundraising.

"I went on a capture, tag and release programme in the berg, which was an amazing experience and decided then I had to do something.

"I prepared an email and powerpoint presentation and sent this to my father's data base of contacts, to encourage people to sponsor these birds," she said.

During her project with the vultures, she decided she wanted to do more. She started scuba diving and developed a passion for it. While free diving with sharks she was given a DVD to watch called *Sharkwater*, which focused on the shark fin trade, which is a million dollar industry.

"I knew I had to help, and decided to establish my NPO, Four Elements, which focuses on preserving the diminishing populations of bearded vultures, rhinos and sharks, and encouraging passion in young people to make a difference in South Africa," she said.

Olivia's first venture was to attempt to summit



Olivia Taylor at the top of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Kilimanjaro last month to raise awareness and funding for the preservation of bearded vultures, rhinos and sharks.

She said climbing Kili was very difficult and she found the first few days very tiring.

"I knew I had to keep going. It took me seven-and-a-half hours to summit but it took me a few days to realise what actually happened as I fainted an hour before the summit.

"It's a mental task more than a physical one, but I had something to climb for," she said. What's next for this driven teenager?

"I have a lot of things lined up like working in Timbavati with the white lions. It's difficult to juggle everything with school as well.

"I'm very involved in sport at school and I am also part of the KZN Youth Orchestra," said Olivia.

Visit www.fourelementsconservation.org or www.beardedvulture.org to support Olivia's cause.