



Melati and Isabel Wijsen



Bella Lack

# BE AN EARTH HERO!

Your planet needs you. Will you help save the world? There are loads of brilliant young eco warriors who are doing just that. To celebrate the 50th Earth Day, let's meet them.



Alex White

**I** magine watching a film about superheroes saving the planet. There's so much to fix and time is running out. Their to-do list includes: protecting the world's wildlife; reducing how much is wasted; and dealing with climate change, which unless it slows down will cause more scorching hot weather, floods and storms. The characters in this film certainly have a lot on their plates.

Except this is real life, not a film, and there are no superheroes in fancy outfits. This time, the stars are you, your family, your friends and their friends too. The rescue of our planet is something we have to do together. In this chapter of Earth's 4.5-billion-year history, we are all going to be the heroes – Earth Heroes!

### Don't be scared

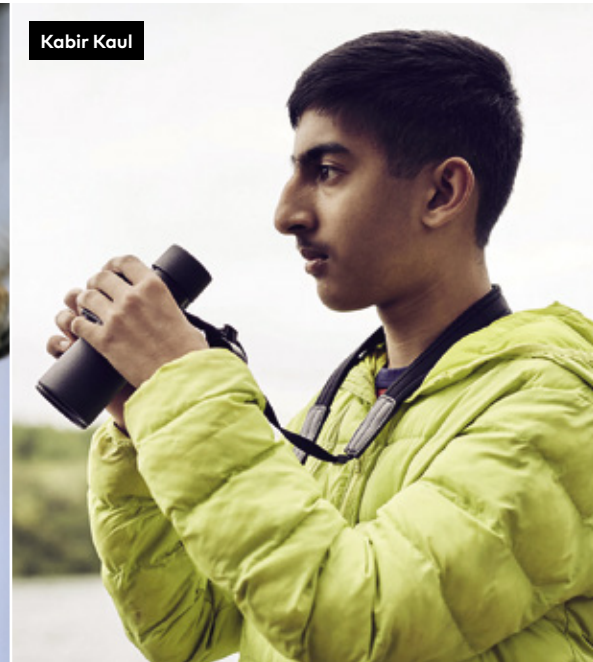
Where do we begin? How does an ordinary person become an Earth Hero? The first thing is not to worry. Be an eco-warrior, not an eco-worrier! There is no point in sitting around thinking that there is nothing you can do. "It doesn't matter how old you are," says Bella Lack, a



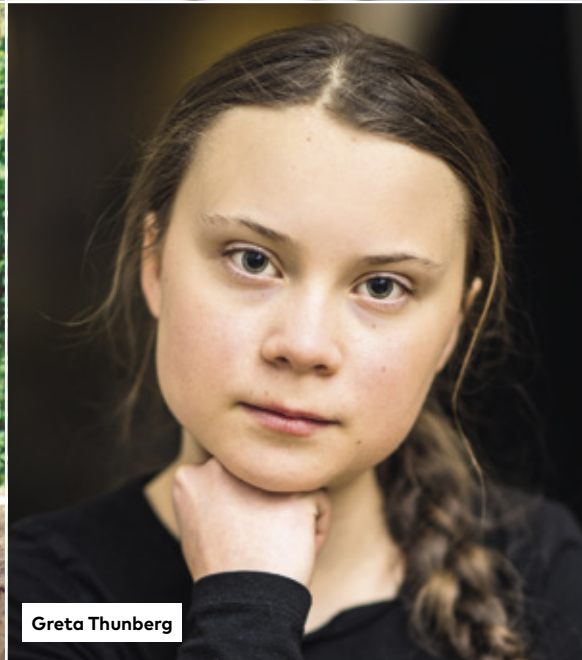
Ben and Lucy Adney



Amy and Ella Meek



Kabir Kaul



Greta Thunberg



Mya-Rose Craig



Lilia Rowe

**YOU ARE THE FUTURE**

Young people under 15 make up only around 25% of the global population, yet they are 100% of the future.



Get involved in a local beach clean.

17-year-old environmental campaigner from London. "Whether you're eight or 80 makes no difference. You can still join in and help create a new story for the future."

## Ditch plastic

Melati and Isabel Wijsen are sisters from Bali, an island in Indonesia, and were sick of seeing plastic littering its beaches. In 2013, when they were 12 and 10 years old, they started a campaign called Bye Bye Plastic Bags. In 2018, all single-use plastic (such as bags and straws) was finally banned on the island. Result!



Kids discovering nature.

Other youth campaigns to fight plastic pollution are taking off around the world. Kids Against Plastic was dreamed up by the Meek sisters from Nottinghamshire. Amy (16) and Ella (14) Meek give presentations and have made videos about the many ways we can use less plastic, and created a website full of practical tips. Lilia Rowe (14) had the bright idea of organising a fun, plastic-free festival, called DeTox, at her school in Cornwall. There were stalls, live music and a clothes swap shop.

Earth Hero campaign? Plastic waste is just one issue on which you might want to focus – there are many others. You could begin by spreading the word among your family and friends.

## A love of nature

Alex White is a 16-year-old nature lover from Oxfordshire, who has appeared on BBC Two's *Springwatch* programme. He also does talks at local primary schools and cub scout groups. "I talk about the simple things we can do to become more eco-friendly," he says.



**"The natural world is a natural calmer. When I am outside I feel less stressed. Being outside is my escape."**

Alex White (16)

By sharing his wildlife sightings on social media, Alex tries to make people care more about the species. Recently, a fox he often photographs was sadly killed on a road. He posted a message about what had happened, telling drivers to slow down, and many people shared it. Alex has also written a book, *Get Your Boots On*, which explains how we can look after the natural world. Does he have any top tips?



Mya-Rose Craig (17)

**"Just do it! It doesn't matter if you are young – you can make changes and influence things in your family or local community."**

## Inspired by *The Week Junior*

In Shropshire, Ben Adney (12) and his sister Lucy (nine) started making food wraps from a mixture of beeswax and cotton, after seeing an article in *The Week Junior*. The wraps are a fabulous alternative to plastic clingfilm, perfect for packed lunches and leftovers. Ben and Lucy's mother helps them to sell the wraps online.

If you're inspired by Bella, Melati, Isabel, Amy, Ella, Lilia, Ben and Lucy, then why not start your own



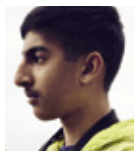
Orangutans are threatened by palm oil plantations.

**POPULAR PRODUCT**  
Palm oil is used in nearly half of the packaged products that people buy in supermarkets.

"What you eat has a big impact on the environment," he says. "Meat especially. So perhaps see if you can eat less meat. Try being veggie one day a week."

## Creatures in the capital

Londoner Kabir Kaul (14) decided to set up a nature club at his school, and now more than 20 people come along each week. "This summer, we're going on a wildlife-watching trip," he says. "But I always tell people you don't need to travel far, as there is plenty of wildlife in towns and cities. Your doorstep has it all – you just need to look."



**"I took a container, filled it with rainwater, and now it has frogs and newts. An instant pond!"**

Kabir Kaul (14)

Three years ago, Kabir had the idea of building a website with a map showing all of the nature reserves and green spaces in London. "I spent whatever spare time I had on it," he says. "My map kept growing, and now it lists 1,300 locations in the capital." Kabir has won an award for his website, Kaul of the Wild ([thekauliswild.blogspot.com](http://thekauliswild.blogspot.com)), and now dreams of turning it into an app. Last

month, Kabir received the Points of Light Award from the Prime Minister Boris Johnson, which recognises the efforts of outstanding UK volunteers and those making a change in their community.

## You have the power

Bella Lack has some advice for all aspiring Earth Heroes: "Stay positive!" she says. "Remember, you have power." She's right. If we each make small changes in our daily lives, the millions of little individual actions add up to a much bigger change. After all, a tiny acorn may not look like much, but one day it will grow into a mighty oak tree – and lots of those trees will create a forest.



Greta campaigns against climate change.

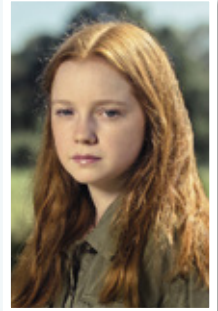
## Meet an Earth Hero

### BELLA LACK

BELLA IS A YOUTH AMBASSADOR FOR SEVERAL CHARITIES. HER FILM, *ANIMAL*, ABOUT PEOPLE SAVING WILDLIFE, IS IN CINEMAS THIS AUTUMN.

#### Do you call yourself an eco-activist?

Yes, but these days, everybody's an activist! I just try to make people realise that they can bring change into the way they live. Whatever you do in life, there's a way to be "greener".



#### What are the main things you talk about?

Wildlife extinction (when species die out) and climate change. If we protect wild animals and plants and stop them from disappearing, and if we look after wild habitats, then that will help solve the climate crisis. When the natural world is healthy, the climate is healthy too.

#### Are you hopeful for the future?

Scientists say we have just 10 years left to prevent serious climate damage. Many teenagers, including me, think about this a lot. It is what is driving us to speak up now. I try to focus on the many hopeful things that are happening.

Bella uses blogs and social media to talk about threats facing wildlife and the environment, and has given talks at many public events. The Government asked her to speak at a conference that was looking at ways to end the illegal trade in wildlife, where she shared the stage with scientists and politicians.

Bella started her campaigning at home, by creating a poster about palm oil. This is found in dozens of household products, from toothpaste to peanut butter and ice cream, and huge areas of rainforest are being cleared to produce it. Could you create a poster to raise awareness, like Bella?

## Be better, like Greta

Today, so many teenagers are doing amazing things to protect the natural world and encourage us to care for it that news reports talk about "Generation Greta". They are referring, of course, to Greta Thunberg, the 17-year-old activist from Sweden. Greta inspired a movement called Fridays for Future, where students take time out of class to go on demonstrations to raise awareness of the dangers of climate change. One day last March, well over a million students around the world joined in.

Greta may be the most famous Earth Hero, but everywhere, more and more young people are speaking up. Maybe grown-ups need to listen to them a bit more.

## Use the car less

**1** Persuade adults to do more trips by bike or on foot. Could you share more car journeys with friends? Another idea is "park and stride" – drive some of the way, walk the rest.



## Spread the word

**2** Ask if you can start a Green Team at school with a few friends. You could suggest ways the school could recycle, do a talk in assembly, or make the grounds better for wildlife.



## Be inspired by a book

**3** Pick up a book for eco-friendly ideas. Here are three to fire you up:

- *Earth Heroes* by Lily Dyu.
- *Fantastically Great Women Who Saved the Planet* by Kate Pankhurst.
- *This Book Will (Help) Cool the Climate* by Isabel Thomas.



# 10 WAYS TO BE AN ECO HERO

## Grow your own

**4** Home-grown fruit and veg cuts down on packaging and transport. Courgettes, spinach and tomatoes are easy to grow in a flowerbed. Make a frame from bamboo canes for sugarsnap peas and green beans. For juicy strawberries, all you need is a hanging basket.

You don't need a garden to grow your own food.



A robin checks out a nestbox.

## Put up a nestbox

**5** Every garden should have nestboxes for tits and robins. You can easily buy them, or ask an adult to help you make one: [wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-nesting-box-birds](http://wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-nesting-box-birds)



Manage your family's waste.

## Be a recycling monitor

**6** Take turns to be in charge of your family's recycling. Keep a "bin diary" for a week, jotting down everything you throw away. Could you swap products for ones with packaging that can be recycled?



Soap bars save on plastic bottles.

## Do a beach clean

**7** Each time you visit a beach, do a #2minutebeachclean. Time yourself and pick up as much rubbish as you can. If you aren't near the coast, clean up a footpath instead. Find more tips at [beachclean.net](http://beachclean.net)



Wear gloves or take a grabber.

## Say "no to the mow"

**8** Let part of your garden lawn grow longer, and allow flowers like daisies and dandelions to appear. These will help bees and other insects, which in turn provide food for birds and hedgehogs.



Turn part of your lawn into a meadow.

## Be plastic clever

**9** Ditch single-use plastic, like bags, balloons, clingfilm, cups, glitter and straws. Now think of other ways to cut down on plastic. Have you tried bars of soap and shampoo sold in cardboard boxes?

## Meet an Earth Hero

### MYA-ROSE CRAIG

MYA-ROSE HAS APPEARED ON TV AND RADIO, AND ORGANISES NATURE DISCOVERY CAMPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM CITIES.

#### What one thing would change if you could?

I would make the outdoors accessible to everyone, no matter what their background. Going to the countryside and nature reserves should not just be for privileged people to enjoy. Nature is good for your mental and physical health. Green spaces, such as woods, fields and hills, are like the NHS (the Natural Health Service).



#### Why did you become a campaigner?

The people you see in the countryside in Britain are mostly white. Because I am mixed-race, I was aware of this from quite a young age. I want to change things! So with my parents' help, I began to organise nature camps for young people in Somerset. A lot of the young people that come are black, Asian or from other ethnic minorities.

#### What is the main message you try to share?

You don't need to be an expert to go to a nature reserve and enjoy the natural world. Who cares if you know the names of all the different birds? It's just about having a nice time outdoors and having fun. It's about having a weekend away with your mates, surrounded by wildlife and fresh air.

## Never give up!

**10** Every green action you take qualifies you as an Earth Hero. As Greta Thunberg said, "I've learned that you are never too small to make a difference."

Greta Thunberg

