



“DING” DARLING WILDLIFE SOCIETY 2015 ANNUAL REPORT



Cover Photos courtesy of Al Hoffacker

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Dear Friends,

Wetlands, swamps, mangroves . . . whatever we may call them, the hundreds of unique and special species of wildlife here at the "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge call them "home." Home for the year or for the season, the Refuge provides just that . . . a refuge for our wildlife who need it to survive.

It's hard to imagine that another year has passed and we are sharing what has once again been a banner year for the Society and it's thousands of members in supporting the conservation work at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. We owe our successes to those who, like us, appreciate and value the "home" which the Refuge provides for our wildlife. The impact of the Refuge is far reaching for it touches everyone in a unique and special way, including the wildlife who can't speak for themselves.

As you know, wildlife refuges like "Ding" Darling need our help. Budgets are tight and federal funding does not cover all the needs of a refuge like "Ding" Darling. As a result, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society – Friends of the Refuge helps provide financial support where funding falls short. For more than 30 years, the Society has supported the Refuge in areas of education, land acquisition, interpretive signs and exhibits, habitat preservation, biological studies, research, and so much more.

It is through the generosity of our members, donors and sponsors, coupled with our dedicated volunteers, interns, board members and staff which has helped make this such an amazing year for the Society and the Refuge. **THANK YOU!!**

During this productive year we saw the design and installation of a new entrance area within the Visitor & Education Center and now we are in the design phase for an update of the "Ding" Darling interpretive exhibit which has not been done since it was installed nearly 15 years ago. The Society supported the study of ecology and seasonal movements of the Reddish Egret and continuation of the study with the Mangrove Cuckoo. We received an anonymous grant to support a summer camp, focusing on the at-risk communities and the camp was a resounding success with plans to continue and expand upon those efforts.

Our collaboration with the City of Sanibel and SCCF to monitor the quality of water flowing into the Refuge from adjacent lands was continued. In addition, the Society has been contacted by several land owners about possible acquisition opportunities for the Refuge and planning improvements to the Bailey Tract.

Our on-going annual support for the Refuge has continued to grow. Every year, the Society provides funding for interpretive signage, educational brochures, biology supplies and equipment, intern stipends and housing support, as well as financial support for the volunteer program. Through grant support, the Society was able to provide opportunities to children and families from economically

challenged communities and offering an enhanced educational experience for others visiting the Refuge. Were it not for our annual support from the "bus lady" and her family foundation, more than 8,000 local elementary students would not have had the opportunity to leave school and spend a day exploring the Refuge and learning in the "natural classroom".

Our yearly activities were expanded. The Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest has continued to grow, giving students in a five county area an opportunity to learn about and appreciate the value of conservation and protecting wildlife. The Society has continued its outreach to Hispanic neighborhoods and international visitors; it continues support of local teachers through the environmental teacher grants and offers student scholarships. The Society has become more active in national, state and local collaborative conservation groups, including the Everglades Coalition and hosting special guests such as Jo-Ellen Darcy, Asst. Secretary of the Army Corp., and other dignitaries from US Fish and Wildlife Service; Department of Interior; as well as some of our elected representatives here in the State of Florida and in Washington, D.C. Our goal is to stress the importance of supporting the Refuge at all levels of government regarding water quality and the overall support of the Refuge system and wildlife protection.

With help from organizations like the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, the Refuge is able to do what it does best: manage its lands and waters, protect its wildlife and habitat, and continue demonstrating its commitment to the environment to the nearly one million annual visitors.

I would also like to thank those who have supported us this year with memberships, gifts, sponsorships and grants. If you have not yet joined our family of friends, I invite you to come to the Refuge. Stop, Look and Listen. We are confident you will see the impact the Refuge and Society have in protecting our wildlife and wild lands, while at the same time inspiring visitors of all ages to become our conservation stewards. We at the Society are proud to be a part of this American treasure.

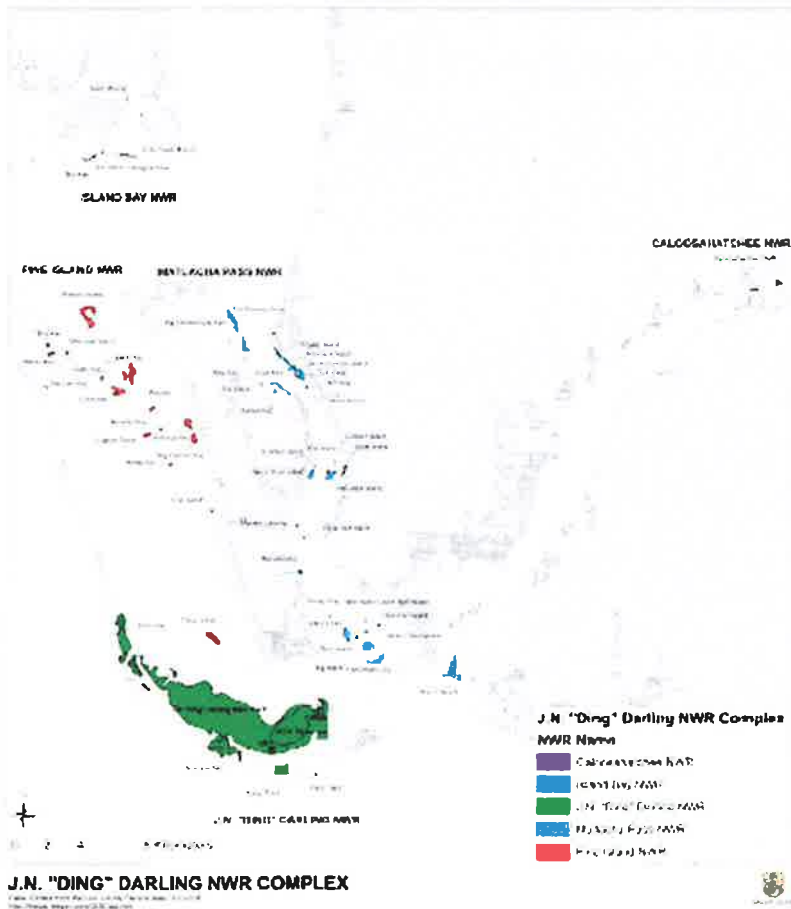
Sincerely,



Doris Hardy, Board President

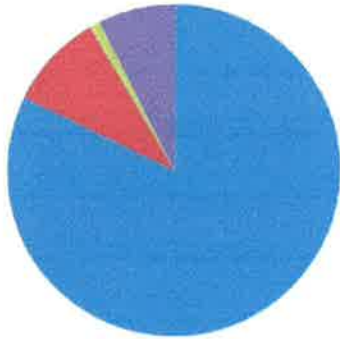
*"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society
Supporting Conservation Work
for the Entire
"Ding" Darling Complex*

The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge is managed as part of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex. A National Wildlife Refuge Complex is an administrative grouping of two or more refuges, wildlife management areas or other refuge conservation areas managed from a central office. The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex also includes the Caloosahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Matlacha Pass National Wildlife Refuge, Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge, and Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge. These lands are primarily mangrove islands, many of which are nesting and roosting areas for wading birds and other waterbirds. The entire complex includes approximately 8,000 acres.



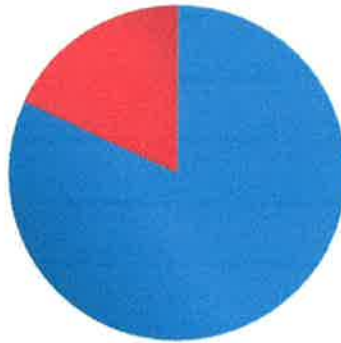
A total of 82% of expenditures went directly to helping the refuge complex and community in the areas of conservation, wildlife protection and education. Refuge support includes items such as displays, exhibits, student busing, equipment, interpretive signage, walkways, land acquisition, scholarships, construction projects, internships, research etc.

**2014 - 2015 Revenue
"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society**



- Memberships & Donations
- Gift Shop
- Investment Return
- Grants & Guest Contributions

2014 - 2015 Expenditures



- Overall Refuge Support
- Administration

The Refuge staff and the Wildlife Society continue to work to bring at-risk families and minorities to the Refuge with hopes that they will become our future conservation stewards.



American Alligator photo courtesy of Linda Kochanowski

Pictured is Ranger Becky Larkins with families enjoying the great outdoors.

Education is key to inspiring future generations of conservation stewards. Through grants from the "bus lady" and a family foundation, the DDWS made it possible for more than 8,000 students to be bused to the Refuge during the school year as well as provided funds for the first Nature Explorers Summer Camp.



Trail cameras and the observation tower camera, funded by DDWS, help the Refuge in areas of wildlife monitoring and research. These cameras are important because they allow wildlife to be observed and studied without disturbing their environments.



The DDWS works to collaborate with other conservation groups, local, state, and federal offices to strengthen the conservation work that needs to be done in the area. DDWS purchased three sondes, valued at \$80,000, which are being used by both the Refuge and SCCF to collect and send a variety of water-quality metrics.



The intern program is an important learning opportunity for the interns and a great asset to the Refuge in helping perform the conservation work in biology, habitat management, education, and visitor services. The DDWS helps to underwrite the intern stipends and other expenses for the program.



Trailgate and Tarpon Tournament are two of several events the DDWS sponsors in raising important philanthropic support for the Refuge. Last year DDWS events raised over \$100,000 for the Refuge.



Reddish Egret, Mangrove Cuckoo and Sanibel Rice Rat Research are examples of the wildlife research made possible with support from the DDWS.



With nearly 8,000 acres to manage in the Refuge Complex and nearly 1 million annual visitors from around the world, volunteers are vital to helping the Refuge staff achieve their conservation work. The DDWS supports the volunteer program expenses for more than 250 volunteers.



The Theodore Cross High School Photography contest, higher-education scholarships, and the Junior Duck Stamp Program are just a few ways the DDWS is providing support for young people interested in the field of conservation.



With a dedicated Refuge staff of only 13 full time employees and limited government funding, the DDWS works to support their conservation work including research, habitat management, education and visitor services.



The Visitor & Education Center got a makeover when the DDWS funded the remodeling of the entryway and front desk/volunteer welcome area.



Our Mission: “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society, the non-profit Friends of the Refuge organization, supports environmental education, services, and conservation at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Education and conservation efforts may extend beyond the complex’s borders. We partner in these efforts where possible with like-minded conservation organizations.



Thank You!

The projects that the Refuge and the Society have accomplished this past year could never be possible without the support of our donors. Thank you for protecting wildlife that cannot speak for themselves.

J.N. *Dingo* Darling
National Wildlife Refuge

