



SUMMER 2018

Society Pages

News from Friends of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, the nonprofit 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.

Restroom Contest: Vote for Our Learning Lavatories



We have officially entered our new Learning Lavatories (#LearningLav) exhibit in the Cinta's America's Best Restroom Contest for 2018. Public voting takes place from **August 6 through September 14**. During that time, please visit www.bestrestroom.com/us to place your vote for "Ding" Darling.

Every day is a new adventure when you visit the Refuge. The newest adventure awaits outside the free Visitor & Education Center. Once you turn the corner from the Center's entrance ramp, you encounter life-sized manatees made from recycled bicycle tires swimming among mangrove roots. A 3D brown pelican scoops a fish from above. Over

continued on page 2



The winning team pulls in one of its six catches. Image courtesy of Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau.

TARPON TOURNEY 2018

Breaking Records!

**\$120,000 RAISED
49 FISH CAUGHT**



Team Doc Ford's catch

The seventh annual "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament on May 11, 2018, topped previous years' fundraising efforts by netting \$120,000 from tournament sponsorships, donations, and silent auction proceeds to benefit the Refuge. To date, the Tarpon Tournament has raised nearly \$450,000 for Refuge water research, wildlife research, and education.

The tournament also broke the record for fish caught, set in the first year of the tournament. Anglers photo-recorded 49 tarpon catches this year, compared to as few as two and as many as 39 in the previous six years.

The 2018 tournament paid out \$29,300 in prizes to five winning teams out of 55 registered teams. The first

continued on page 2



First place winners, Team Costa with Caloosahatchee Cowboy Charters, received a check for \$13,185.

TARPON 2018



continued from page 1
place prize of \$13,185 went to Team Costa with Caloosahatchee Cowboy Charters members for catching six fish.

Four teams caught four tarpon each to take the remaining four cash prizes, ranked according to what time they recorded their first tarpon catch of the day.

RESTROOM CONTEST

continued from page 1

head, an alligator lurks and duck feet dangle. Fish and other mangrove estuary creatures feel lifelike and, as you move through this immersive underwater scene — much like a fish yourself — you reach the restrooms. The exhibits dazzle, but also educate along the walk with interpretive messaging about the wildlife and saving the environment.

Inside the two restrooms, tarpon, otter, osprey, and sea turtle sculptures continue the underwater wildlife illusion. Photographic tile murals depict a lush, watery mangrove scene on one wall. Close-up professional bird photos wrap stall doors, with identification information on the inside. “Ding” Darling’s #LearningLav exhibit made news when it opened and continues to make a splash with visitors, who love taking photos and selfies next to the manatees.

Unlike any other bathrooms in the world, the restrooms encourage visitors to become entirely immersed in Refuge habitat and wildlife, and to come inside the Center to learn more. Learning Lavatories turns a necessary “nature call” into a “nature enthrall.”

Team Doc Ford’s pulled in the day’s second tarpon at 7:31 a.m., nabbing the second-place award of \$7,325. Team Mabry Electric won \$4,395 for third place; Team Barker Boatworks, \$2,930 for fourth place; and Team Captiva Cruises, \$1,465 for fifth place.

The tournament also gave out awards for female angler to Deb Powers from Team Fishin’ Divas, senior angler to Brian Bartholomew from Team Poondoggers, amateur team to Team On Island, and others who caught fish that day.

“One hundred percent of the anglers’ registration fees goes to the awards purse,” said tournament organizer Birgie Miller, Executive Director of the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society. “That’s why our sponsorship partners are so important to us. They pay the costs for putting on the tourney and contribute to the charity proceeds.” (See insert for our list of sponsors.)

about the importance of ethical and responsible fishing.” For more information on the tournament and this year’s winners, visit www.dingdarlingtarpontourney.org.



Doc Ford’s Marty Harrity presents Team Costa captain Josh Constantine with a prestigious pink tarpon jacket.

DDWS organizes the annual tournament with Doc Ford’s Rum Bar & Grille of Sanibel Island, Fort Myers Beach, and Captiva Island as the title sponsor. Tournament social events took place at the Fort Myers Beach location.

“We can’t thank Doc Ford’s enough for their incredible show of support these past seven years,” said Birgie. “They’ve already committed for the 2019 tourney, which will take place May 2 and 3, 2019, by choice of the winning team.”

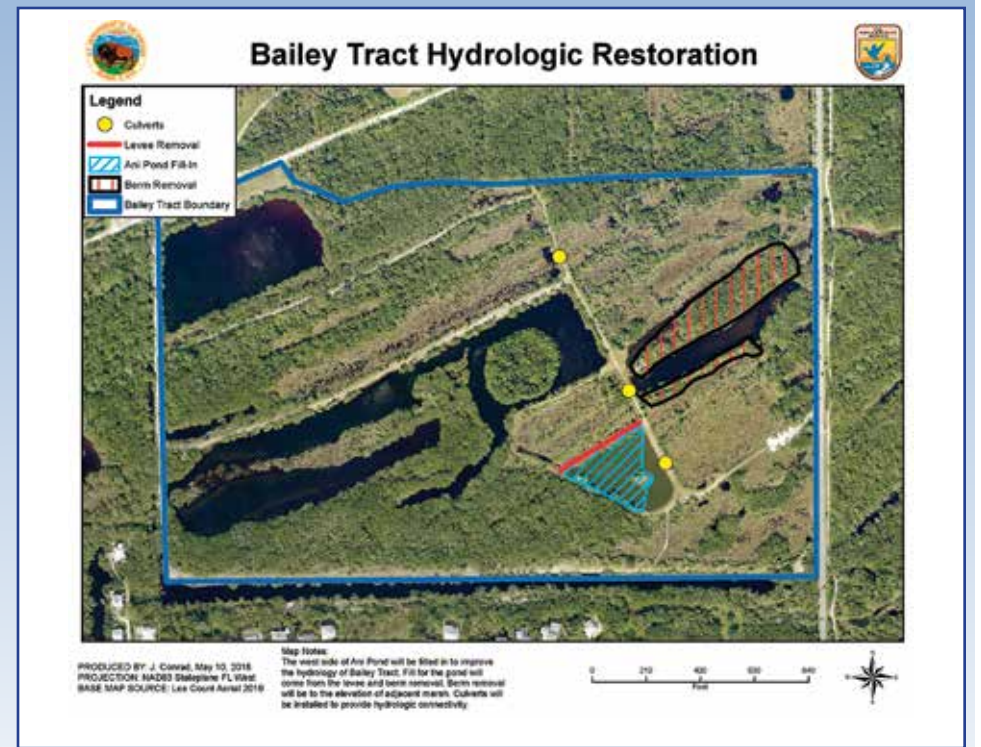
“We are so grateful for this fundraiser, because not only does it add much-needed dollars to the Refuge budget, it also supports our conservation mission,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. “Plus, it is an opportunity to remind anglers, both professional and amateur,

To keep in the Tarpon Tournament loop and be among the first to know when registration for the 2019 event will open, text SOCIETY to 50555.

Bailey Tract Restoration

The Bailey Tract Restoration Project got underway on June 4, 2018. To ensure public safety, this area will be closed to all public access until possibly mid-July, or until completion of this habitat restoration. Because of the Tract’s popularity, the Refuge opted to do the work during the slower summer months and will expedite the project to complete it this summer.

In response to public comments, the restoration has been modified, and certain portions of the restoration have been changed. Goals for the project involve hydrologic enhancements that will benefit all wildlife that inhabits the Tract. Species such as secretive marsh birds and others dependent on Spartina marsh habitats will thrive as a result. The proposed action will partially restore the historic hydrology of the Bailey Tract and ultimately restore its original marsh habitat. For questions, please contact Refuge Manager at paul_tritaik@fws.gov.



Free Summer Programs Underway

Wildlife Wonders talks, weekly walks, and nature crafts highlight the free summer programs available through August 4 at the Refuge. Summer programming is made possible by support from the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society. The schedule of weekly activities follows. No pre-registration is necessary.

- Reading in the Refuge, every Wednesday at 10 a.m.: Attendees of each 45-minute reading-and-crafts session learn about a Refuge animal and make a take-home craft related to it. Meet in the Visitor & Education Center classroom.
- Indigo Trail Walk, every Thursday at 10 a.m.: Join Refuge naturalists as they lead a one-hour tour to the Wildlife Education Board to identify and discuss the ecosystem’s plants, mammals, birds, and reptiles — fun for adults and children alike. Bring water, sunscreen, and bug spray. Meet at the flagpole in front of the Visitor & Education Center.
- Family Beach Walk, every Friday at 9 a.m.: The one-hour program convenes at Gulfside Park to explore the Refuge’s gulf-front Perry Tract. City parking fees apply. Bring water, sunscreen, and bug spray.
- Wildlife Wonders, every Saturday at 11 a.m.: Refuge education staff lead this 30-minute indoor program about the mysteries of manatees, alligators, crocodiles, horseshoe crabs, and birds in the Visitor & Education Center auditorium.

For more information on the Refuge summer programs, call 239-472-1100 ext. 237 or visit dingdarling-society.org/articles/free-refuge-programs.



Get your family outdoors and engaged on Indigo Trail every Thursday morning.



Ben Vanos’ “Green Heron Raising its Crest” took first place in 2017’s “Ding” Darling Days Amateur Nature Photography Contest.

Photo Contest Opens Soon

July 15 marks the opening of the annual “Ding” Darling Days Amateur Nature Photography Contest. Deadline for submission is September 15, 2018, and all entries must be submitted electronically. The contest, sponsored by the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society, is held in conjunction with “Ding” Darling Days, October 12-14, 2018 (www.dingdarlingdays.com).

Complete contest rules and entry forms are available at dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests.

DDWS will announce winners and award prizes at Conservation Art Day on Saturday, October 13, during “Ding” Days.

Entries must be delivered by email to ddamateur-photocontest@gmail.com by September 15, 2018. For assistance, please call 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or email shois@dingdarlingsociety.org.

STAFF NEWS

DDWS Staff Changes

The “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society recently announced two permanent staff changes.

Philanthropic Coordinator Carrie Alexander resigned from her post as of May 17. Carrie, who began as an intern three years ago, has held her current position for two years. A geology and environmental science student from Hanover College in Indiana, she graduated in May 2015 and joined DDWS in September of that year. Carrie will be moving to Sydney, Australia, to pursue her love of conservation in an entirely new habitat.



Carrie Alexander

“While bittersweet, we are excited about this next step in her life and wish her all the very best,” said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. “She had grown into a valued member of our team and will be missed a great deal.”

Senior intern Sierra Hoisington recently joined the DDWS staff in a fulltime capacity and will be taking over the position vacated by Carrie. Sierra, a graduate of Clemson University with a bachelor’s degree in wildlife and fisheries biology, began as a DDWS intern in fall 2016. In her new position, she will be assisting with events, educational outreach, donor stewardship, photography contests, and all fundraising efforts.



Sierra Hoisington

“Sierra’s passion for ‘Ding’ Darling and conservation overall is infectious,” said Sarah Lathrop, DDWS Associate Director. “She has become a crucial part of the ‘Ding’ team and we are so happy she will be joining us full-time.”

Welcome New Intern

Education intern Shannon MacKenzie arrived in May to help the Refuge with staffing shortages this summer, thanks to funding from DDWS.

Shannon, a senior at Washington State University in Pullman, is studying environmental and ecosystem sciences with hopes to become a teacher or park ranger.



Shannon MacKenzie

“That’s why this internship in the education department is so perfect for me!” she said. “I get to teach children about the environment around them. It’s a lot of fun to see a child’s face light up when they learn something new.”

Having visited family often on Sanibel, Shannon was excited to spend the summer here and learn about a new ecosystem. She assists Refuge Conservation Educator Sara Hallas through mid-August, when she will return to school to finish her degree.

DDWS provides living stipends and other benefits for about a dozen interns each year. The Refuge supports interns and resident volunteers with free housing.

“Our interns bring youthful energy, enthusiasm, and creativity to the Refuge team,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. “At the same time, the program gives students and recent graduates an opportunity to learn hands-on about the environment and Refuge operations.”

For more information about the Refuge’s internship programs, contact Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland at 239-472-1100 ext. 237. To learn about supporting the Refuge Intern Program, contact Sarah Lathrop, DDWS Associate Director, at 239-472-1100 ext. 4.

Refuge Bids Farewell to Susan Trokey

Refuge and DDWS staff, volunteers, and, on her going-away cake, wildlife thanked Susan Trokey for 20 years of service at the Refuge and beyond in May. She most recently served as Regional Land Acquisitions Officer for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and has been instrumental in negotiating past land acquisitions at “Ding” Darling. Good luck, Susan, in all of your future endeavors!



Susan Trokey

Ranger Toni Receives Award

On April 21, Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, traveled to Crystal River, Florida, to accept the Florida chapter of The Wildlife Society’s (FLTWS) 2018 Outstanding Educator Award.

Erin Myers, a Partners for Fish & Wildlife biologist at Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge east of Naples, along with Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik, nominated Toni for the award. Erin wrote: “Her work at ‘Ding’ Darling ranges from leading education programs for kids and adults to overseeing visitor services for over 930,000 visitors a year and initiating new and innovative projects (i.e. Learning Laboratories) that garner national attention.” Congratulations, Toni!



Toni with her award and biologist Erin Myers, who nominated her for the award



New equipment and upgrades improve live camera feed that visitors can view in the Visitor & Education Center and from their computers and smart devices.

Webcam and Wireless Upgrades

Recently the Refuge upgraded its live webcam equipment and the Visitor & Education Center internet service’s size and speed. The changes have improved the overall quality and dependability of the live observation tower camera feed, both in the Center and online at dingdarlingsociety.com. Camera feed continues to work even when the Center’s internet is down. The upgrades also provide the possibility for DDWS to expand and improve the usage of WiFi in the center.

The Live Refuge Cam, made possible by donations from the Gardner Families, broadcasts live feed throughout daylight hours.

FOLLOW AND LIKE US

DDWS is currently active on three social media platforms. Please “LIKE” us on Facebook (join our 11,700 fans!) by searching for “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society. (You can also “LIKE” the Refuge by searching for its “Official” page.) Instagram users can find us at @dingdarlingwildlifesociety, where our numbers top 6,800 followers. Also visit our YouTube channel by searching “ding darling wildlife society.”



News from the Mangrove Cuckoo Study

Dr. Kenneth Meyer, Executive Director of the Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI) conducting Mangrove Cuckoo research at “Ding” Darling, reported in May: “We recently received our most important results to date. Cross Dike, the fourth and final Mangrove Cuckoo we tagged with a donated transmitter (last February, as a wintering bird), made a sudden move northeastward on a track similar to that taken by Indigo East two years before (see map below). Furthermore, both birds moved during the same week in April. The only difference was that Cross Dike traveled an additional six miles across a second channel before settling in the broad mangrove forest on the western shore of Cape Coral - a total of 12 miles from its wintering area on Sanibel.

“Obviously, we are working with a small sample of tagged Mangrove Cuckoos. However, we now have highly consistent movement data, on fine time and spatial scales, from the two study birds whose tracking periods have bridged the wintering and breeding seasons. This is very exciting!”

Late May update: “We have 2 satellite transmitters in the works due here by early June. Goal: tag 2 breeding season birds to see if they stay or go for the winter, or whatever else they do while we’re watching.”

The plan is to tag another two birds next winter, for a total of four new transmitter applications.

“Ding” Darling Wildlife Society provides monetary support for the Refuge Mangrove Cuckoo Study to help Refuge managers determine the best way to manage the species, whose numbers have been steadily declining. ARCI uses lightweight, state-of-the-art satellite transmitters to track cuckoos tagged at the Refuge.

Anyone interested in helping DDWS with the purchase of the four new satellite transmitters should please contact Sarah Lathrop at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or sarah@dingdarlingsociety.org. Total cost per bird — which includes the transmitter, staff time, and data tracking services — is \$9,000 each.



The “Cross Dike” cuckoo was tagged in February.



Anhinga chicks by Janet and Aaron Kirk

WILDLIFE SPOTLIGHT



Black-necked Stilt by Terry Baldwin



Green Heron chicks by Jim Bennight

Here, we showcase the best of wildlife shots taken recently at the Refuge by photographers, volunteers, staff, and others. Spring is in full swing, and new chicks are arriving daily. Thanks to our Refuge photographers and friends for their “outdoorable” contributions to the birth announcements.

If you have a wildlife picture to share, please contact Sarah Lathrop at sarah@dingdarlingsociety.org.

TARPON BAY EXPLORERS SCHEDULE*

(tarponbayexplorers.com; call ahead to 239-472-8900 to confirm schedule and make reservations)

Tram Tours of Wildlife Drive: July and Aug: Mon-Thurs 10am, 11:30am, 1pm, 2:30pm, and 4pm; Sat-Sun 10am, 1pm, and 4pm; Sept: Tues, Thurs, and Sat 10 am, 1 pm, 4pm

Kayak Trail Tour: Daily 8:30am or 10am; July and Aug: also Mon-Fri 1pm

Sunset Rookery Paddle: Mon, Wed, Fri and Sat or Sun. All 2 hours prior to sunset.

Breakfast Cruise: July and Aug: Mon, Wed, Fri 8:30am; Sept: Wed 8:30am

Standup Paddleboard Tour: Tues, Thurs, Sat. All 9am
Nature and Sea Life Cruise: July and Aug: Daily at 11am and 1:30pm; Sept: Mon, Wed, Fri, Sun 11am and 1:30 pm

Evening Cruise: July and Aug: Daily. Sept: Mon, Wed, Fri, Sun. All 2 hours prior to sunset.

Aquarium & Touch Tank: Daily at 3pm

Rentals and fishing charters: Daily 8am-6pm

MEMORIAL AND HONOR GIFTS

March 1 – May 31, 2018

Memorial gifts and gifts made in honor of special occasions are a wonderful way to pay tribute to family and friends who are important to us. Throughout the year, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society has received gifts in memory and in honor of loved ones. Thank you to everyone who supported the Refuge in this thoughtful and meaningful way.

We recently received gifts in **MEMORY** of the following:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Adaline H. Allen | Greta and Pierson Long |
| Rosalie Courter | Craig Malcolm |
| Edith Thatcher De Burlo | Susan Murphy |
| Mary Sue Denk | Gloria L. Pommerenke |
| Dr. David Drachman | Sally Reed |
| Thomas Parmelee Dupree, Sr. | Amy Simkowitz Rogers |
| Ruth and Charlie Gerecke | Rosina B. Rue |
| Christine Glancy | Rosemary Shipley |
| Gerald Holman | Kathleen Stanley |
| Elaine Jacobson | William Stein |
| Mary Helen Ladner | Kathryn Todd |
| Maggie Larson | |

We recently received gifts in **HONOR** of the following:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Carrie Alexander | Tyson Hass |
| Elaine Bachelder | Peter Hawrylyshyn |
| Wayne and Linda Boyd | Lafayette School 4th Grade |
| Dr. Andrew Dahlem | Joel & Wandrea Lauchner |
| Dr. Andrew and Laura Dahlem | Birgie Miller |
| Peter and Susan Danford | Kathleen O’Beirne |
| Janet Falcone | Mary and John Roth |
| Phyllis Gresham | Susan Trokey |



Upcycled crafts were part of both Earth Day at the Refuge on April 21 and World Oceans Day at the Refuge on June 8.



Bagzilla, the plastic consumer monster, made appearances for Earth Day.



More than 20 participants attended World Oceans Day Beach Walk & Cleanup at Perry Tract.

Celebrating Earth and Oceans



Biology Intern Report

Written by Taylor Gosselin before her departure this spring

Born and raised in Maine, I was not overly familiar with having alligators in my backyard or manatees and dolphins out in a bay of bath temperature water. Nor did I ever expect that I would be spending eight months in an area where these animals are as common as our Black-capped Chickadees. But lo and behold, that is exactly what happened, and I couldn’t be more appreciative of the opportunity given to me.

During my time as a Refuge biology intern, working for Senior Biologist Jeremy Conrad, I was exposed to an entirely different way of life in an area distinctly diverse from what I would consider “normal.” My days always gave me something new and interesting to work on and learn, whether it was scoping and marking Gopher Tortoise burrows, spending countless hours in the mangroves studying vertical land movement and sea level rise, helping FWC with a manatee rescue, conducting wading and shorebird surveys, or assisting SCCF with their winter shorebird surveys, oyster reef restoration



project, and sea turtle walks.

I believe this internship helped me grow in numerous ways. For starters, I developed a deeper appreciation and interest in birds and refined my birding abilities by leaps and bounds. This was one of my main interests/goals when applying for the position, as this Refuge is dedicated to the conservation and research of bird species. In addition, I learned more about the role refuges play in educating and working with the public to further conservation and management goals. My experiences while working here have helped me to grow as a wildlife biologist, and I look forward to using what I’ve learned in graduate school and beyond.

I would like to thank the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society for helping young professionals like me to have this opportunity to grow. I would also like to thank those who donate to the Society. Without you there would be no funding for the Refuge to offer several different internship positions here. Thanks for everything, Sanibel!

2018 Scholarship Awards

At a special after-hours gathering at the Refuge on June 13, “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society awarded \$19,700 in conservation education scholarships to 15 students from the surrounding five-county area. During its 12-year history, the DDWS Environmental Scholarship Program has awarded a total of \$116,700.

“The Society is committed to educating today’s youth as conservation stewards of the future,” said DDWS Education Chair Wendy Kindig. “We work with businesses and individuals to provide annual scholarships to award to outstanding students pursuing degrees related to conservation, wildlife biology, and the environment. A big thank you to our scholarship sponsors for helping us in our mission.”

Nine donors sponsored the 15 scholarships this year: DDWS awarded two **Richard Bailey Scholarships** named in memory of a longtime refuge volunteer and donated by his family. They went to **Taylor Hancock**, an Estero High graduate now studying environmental science at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) in Fort Myers; and **Robert Smith**, a North Fort Myers High graduate who will be majoring in environmental studies at FGCU.

The **Mike and Terry Baldwin Scholarship**, named for DDWS’ president and his wife, an emeritus board member, went to **Katie Thorp**, a Fort Myers High graduate studying environmental engineering at the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville.

Sarah Swiersz, a Southwest Florida Christian Academy (Fort Myers) graduate studying computational and physical science at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando, received the **Dr. Andrew and Laura Dahlem Scholarship**. The Dahlems live part-time on Sanibel Island and were honored with a named scholarship by family members.

Barron Collier High (Naples) graduate **Morgan Humphrey**, who now studies environmental engineering at FGCU, was awarded the **Dr. H. Randall Deming Endowed Scholarship for Conservation & Environmental Studies**. Deming’s family established the memorial in 2016 as a permanently endowed scholarship in his memory.

Two **Leslie & Hans Fleischner Scholarships** went to **Anthony Bonacolto**, a Bishop Verot High (Fort Myers) graduate who studies marine science and microbiology at the University of Miami (UM); and Cypress Lake High graduate **Dara Craig**, who studies wildlife ecology and conservation at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. The Fleischners are part-time Sanibel residents whose love of the island’s environment moved them to sponsor the scholarship.

Maegan Mikkelson, a recent graduate of North Fort Myers High who is headed to UF to major in environmental studies, won the **Mary Elaine Jacobson Memorial Scholarship**, made possible by the Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society.

Barron Collier High graduate **Kevin Macias**, studying biological sciences at Cornell University in Ithaca,

New York, received the **Francine Litofsky Scholarship**, in memory of a published nature photographer and active refuge volunteer.

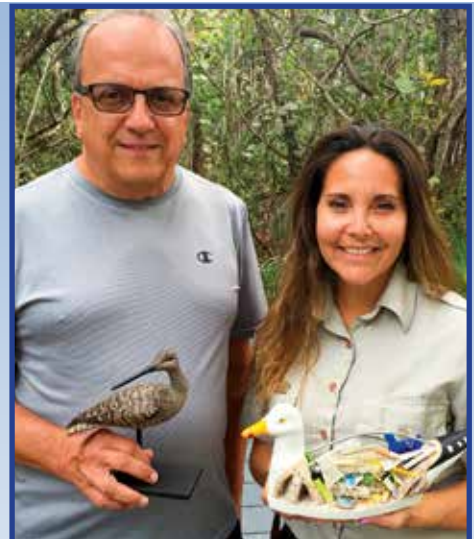
Tarpon Bay Explorers Scholarships sponsored five recipients: Seacrest Country Day School (Naples) graduate **Stella Souza**, who will study environmental science at the University of South Florida in Tampa; **Adrian Dougherty**, a graduate of Fort Myers High studying wildlife ecology and conservation at UF; **Jack Joer**, a Barron Collier High graduate studying oceanic engineering at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton; **Danielle Winchel**, a recent Oasis High (Cape Coral) headed to UF to study environmental science; and **Haleigh Niles**, a recent Lemon Bay High (Englewood) graduate entering Washington University in St. Louis to study environmental earth science. Tarpon Bay Explorers started the original DDWS scholarship program in 2007.

The **Jane Werner Endowed Environmental Scholarship**, DDWS’ first permanently endowed scholarship established in 2011, went to recent Naples High graduate **Griffin Alexander**, who will be attending UM to study marine ecosystems, policy and law.

“These students become part of the greater ‘Ding’ Darling family,” said Wendy Kindig. “We welcome them back as scholarship applicants next year and as fellow conservation stewards in years to come.”

DDWS will be awarding scholarships of \$1,000 to \$4,000 at the end of the 2018-2019 school year. High school seniors and college students living in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, and Hendry counties and pursuing careers in biology, conservation, and environmental studies are eligible.

For an application and to read full descriptions of 2018 scholarship winners and donors, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/student-scholarships. Individuals and businesses interested in establishing a named scholarship of \$1,000 or more for 2018 should contact Sarah Lathrop at 239-472-1100 ext. 4, sarah@dingdarlingsociety.org.



Bird Art Donations

Thanks to Ken Yacovone, pictured here with Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, for the donation of two pieces of bird art. The one on the right, a wooden gull form filled with plastic found on the beach, will be used by Refuge staff for educational purposes. The shorebird on the left will be auctioned at a future date. Ken, who began carving birds in Ohio in the late 1980s, has moved to Cape Coral. “Taking a rough piece of wood and transforming it into something beautiful has always been magical for me,” he said.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Free Summer Programs
Through August 4, 2018

30th Annual “Ding” Darling Days
October 12-14, 2018

Eighth Annual “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon
Tournament
May 3, 2019

SAVE THE DATE

‘Ding’ Darling Days 2018

Mark your calendars for October 12-14, the dates for this year’s 30th annual “Ding” Darling Days at the Refuge. “Because of increasing budget cuts and staff reductions, we are shortening this year’s eco-festival from one week to three weekend days,” reports Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland.

The weekend kicks off with Friday’s Get Outdoors Day, followed by Saturday’s traditional Conservation Art Day. Sunday Family Fun Day will crown the weekend with all-free activities for kids and adults and a celebration of “Ding” Days’ 30th year. Visit www.dingdarlingdays.com for a calendar of events and information on becoming a sponsor.



Family Fun Day culminates the 30th anniversary of “Ding” Darling Days.

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Florida Junior Duck Stamp Contest

On March 22, the Refuge hosted the Florida Junior Duck Stamp (JDS) Contest, as it does every year. Judges reviewed 2,110 entries from students across the state. They included Refuge Senior Biologist Jeremy Conrad, past Florida JDS winner John Brennan, local artist Nancy Tome, JDS founder Jaye Boswell, and Refuge volunteer and photographer Jim Bennight. Anna Grace Swanson, 15, from Titusville, took Best of Show with her pair of Blue-winged Teals. Her art advanced to the Federal JDS Contest, and she will appear at Conservation Art Day during "Ding" Darling Days in October.



Florida Best of Show



Refuge Conservation Educator Sara Hallas (left) and Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland (right) with judges.