

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release.

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Caption for PYTHON: Dusty Crum and Mike Kirkland presented at the 2019 “Ding” Darling lecture series to full houses.

Caption for DSC09341-1: Dusty “Wildman” Crum in the field with a capture, photo by Joey Waves.

Celebrity python hunter, scientist headline on ‘Ding’ Darling Day

Everglades Burmese python hunter Dusty “Wildman” Crum has appeared in a number of television spots, including the *Today Show* late 2017, *Swamp Mysteries* on the History Channel in June 2018, and most recently this year on the Discovery Channel’s “Guardians of the Glades” series.

Biologist Mike Kirkland manages the python elimination program for the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), which created it to try to remedy the Burmese python epidemic in the Florida Everglades. He manages a team of about 25 hunters while keeping abreast of scientific programs that work in cooperation toward solving the problem.

Crum and Kirkland will co-present a free program about their work to save Everglades’ wildlife from total devastation at the appetite of exotic Burmese pythons at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on “Ding” Darling Day, Sunday, Oct. 20, at 11 a.m. in the Visitor & Education Center Auditorium.

“We used to find birds, ducks, deer, rabbits, otters, and raccoons,” said Crum, who largely hunts for snakes – while typically sporting bare feet -- in the eastern Everglades. “Where I’ve been hunting, there are none of these animals left.”

Researchers believe the pythons have decimated their food supply of prey in the eastern Everglades and Miami-Dade County, says Kirkland. In response, he has expanded SFWMD’s

python elimination program, deploying python hunters into Collier County, to where the snakes are moving to find more prey.

Note: There will be no live pythons presented as part of this program.

During “Ding” Darling Day, the Refuge Nature Store will be selling an assortment of wallets, coin purses, and other handmade gifts produced by Crum and his partner from the skins of pythons he has captured.

The 31st annual eco-festival runs all day Oct. 20 with free activities that include free admission to Wildlife Drive and refuge tram tours, live wildlife presentations, animal yoga, nature sketching, origami, archery clinics, hot dogs, a touch tank and butterfly house, face-painting, and kids’ nature crafts. Federal Duck Stamp and Junior Duck Stamp winner presentations, plus conservation art activities will take place throughout the day. Refuge officials estimate the value of free activities that day at \$75 for a family of four.

Recreation concession Tarpon Bay Explorers (www.tarponbayexplorers) offers free stand-up paddleboarding clinics in the morning and all-day discounts on kayak tours and boating excursions for “Ding” Day. Reservations for tours are recommended.

“Ding” Darling Day celebrates the birthday of the refuge’s namesake, father of the Federal Duck Stamp program and Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist, Jay N. “Ding” Darling. It will be part of the pre-celebration for the refuge’s 75th anniversary in 2020.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), and Tarpon Bay Explorers cosponsor “Ding” Darling Day with generous support from the local community and businesses.

Visit www.dingdarlingdays.com for a full schedule of the day’s events or call 239-472-1100 for more information.

Sponsors for the 2019 event include: **ROSEATE SPOONBILL SPONSORS:** Doc’s Ford Sanibel Rum Bar & Grille; **GREAT EGRET SPONSORS:** Mitchell’s Sand Castles, Feather Jim & Patty Sprinkle; **GREAT BLUE HERON SPONSORS:** Bailey’s General Store, Mike & Terry Baldwin, Bank of the Islands, Casa Ybel Resort, The Cedar Chest Fine Jewelry, Island Sun/River

Weekly, Just Water, Rotary Club of Sanibel-Captiva, Sanibel Captiva Community Bank, Sanibel-Captiva Kiwanis Club, Sanibel Moorings, Sunny Day Guide; **REDDISH EGRET SPONSORS:** Sarah Ashton - Realtor, RE/MAX of the Islands, The Gresham Family, Island Inn, Jensen's on the Gulf and Marina & Cottages, Tiffani Kaliko and John Silvia, Dick & Emily Muench, Palm Printing, Stewart & Sons Insurance; **SNOWY EGRET SPONSORS:** Ambu Yoga, Big Red Q Quickprint, Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership, John Brennan, Colony Inn, Panther Printing, Santiva Chronicle, George & Wendy Schnapp, Winston & Gretchen Spurgeon, Nancy Tome.

ABOUT DDWS

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, DDWS works to support J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge's mission of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, research, and public education through charitable donations and Refuge Nature Shop profits.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit www.dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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