

Rebecca “Becky” Woodward

December 18th, 2019

To the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society:

It has been an incredible experience being a biology intern at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society has made it possible for me to learn about the natural history and biology of Sanibel. While here, I graduated from graduate school and now have my master’s degree in environmental management and sustainability. This would not have been possible without the generous donors who have enabled me to start my environmental career at a truly unique and beautiful place.

While here, I worked on a project assessing the use of a citizen science birding app, eBird, as a management tool. I compared surveys submitted in eBird’s database to surveys conducted by the refuge biology team from 2008 to 2018 at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge Bailey Tract. The research shows that eBird is capturing similar data to that collected by our biological monitoring. Sanibel has a tremendous group of birders that keep the citizen science database a reliable source. The goal of this project was to encourage the refuge management team to use citizen science data for management of our bird populations.

In addition to my independent project analyzing citizen science data, I worked on a variety of other projects to ensure habitat protection for the wildlife using the refuge. Mangrove ecology was an important aspect of this internship as we assessed their vulnerability to climate change. We collected data to answer questions related to seedling production, tree growth, root growth, decomposition rates, and soil elevation amongst other things. The biology team traveled to Pelican Island, Crocodile Lake, Ten Thousand Islands, and Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuges to read the soil elevation tables in their mangrove forests. Believe it or not, I was not much of a birder before coming to Sanibel; I typically did research related to plants or pollinators. Excitingly, I can’t say that about myself any longer.

The critical habitat that J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge provides to wildlife has made my birding experience a remarkable one. I can’t imagine a better place to fall in love with birding. In addition to surveying birds, I had the opportunity to survey seagrass to monitor populations in the Refuge and throughout Tarpon Bay.

These experiences have created opportunities for advancement in my professional career and personal life. I have made lifelong friends while being a part of the “Ding” family and the refuge staff have empowered me to think critically and creatively. I hold dearly the memories I have made and will carry the knowledge I’ve gained to my future endeavors. I have enjoyed my time here and thank you so much for this experience while interning at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

Sincerely,

Rebecca “Becky” Woodward