



# Protect. Educate. Inspire.

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Chelle Koster Walton

239-699-4754

[ChelleTrav@aol.com](mailto:ChelleTrav@aol.com)

Caption: Sales of ShopDingDarling.com face masks and other items help support the refuge during closures.

OMG logo attached

### **Monthly giving program latest in DDWS pandemic recovery measures**

This week, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) rolled out its OMG (Once-a-Month Giver) program as part of ongoing efforts to recoup financial losses caused by pandemic closures and cancellations.

“As is the case with a lot of our island charities, our fundraising efforts have been severely curtailed,” said DDWS executive director Birgie Miller. “A real challenge for us in raising support for the J.N. ‘Ding’ Darling National Wildlife Refuge has been the closure of our physical Nature Store while the refuge’s Visitor & Education Center has been shuttered since March. Normally, thousands of visitors a month come to the center to purchase items to remember their visit and support our efforts outright with a gift.”

Shortly before the pandemic lockdown, the store had debuted its ShopDingDarling.com e-commerce component, so staff has been working hard on growing that presence much more quickly than at first planned.

“Kudos to manager Ann-Marie Wildman and her team, who beefed up the online inventory and added curbside pickup and personal shopper services,” Miller added. “They also added a line of face coverings, which have become big sellers. We are so grateful to our loyal shoppers who continue to support the

refuge this way, with 100 percent of profits benefiting wildlife research, education, and overall conservation.”

DDWS has added the new OMG program to benefit donors by making it easy to contribute automatic donations each month. OMG donors will receive special benefits that are still under development. More information is available at [dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/once-a-month-giver](http://dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/once-a-month-giver).

While the refuge’s Wildlife Drive and trails remained open since the start of lockdown, with Tarpon Bay Explorers concessions later coming back, DDWS has remained fully operational in its role keeping visitors engaged and educating the public. That meant staffing and funding a number of free and virtual programs such as “Ding” at Home videos and Virtual Nature Explorers Summer Camp, with the help of refuge staff. In addition, conservation work at the refuge never stopped, and DDWS supports its research, habitat restoration, and internships.

Last month, DDWS held a virtual baby shower to draw attention to all the new hatchlings at the refuge and raise donations, a campaign Miller calls creative and immediately successful.

“The pandemic certainly put a crimp in the refuge’s 75th anniversary celebration this year,” said Miller, adding that several exhibitions, speakers, and activities had to be canceled. DDWS still, however, will host a gala event on the anniversary date, Dec. 1, 2020, but in drive-in theater style at The Community House.

In the meantime, Miller and her team hope to reap benefits from the OMG program by engaging new friends of the refuge.

“We are truly blessed with our supportive and generous body of sponsors and donors,” said Miller. “They understand the importance of continued funding to the refuge in its efforts to monitor water quality, keep our wildlife thriving, and educate and inspire the next generation to continue on with our work.”

For more information about DDWS and its support efforts, visit [dingdarlingsociety.org](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or call Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 232.

#### 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.



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To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit [dingdarlingsociety.org](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).