



WINTER 2022

Society Pages

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

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, the non-profit Friends of the Refuge organization, supports the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex through the generation of independent funds to undertake student education, internships, research projects, informational literature, advocacy, land acquisition, and facility enhancements. Efforts may extend beyond the Complex's borders and involve partnerships with like-minded conservation organizations.

VISITOR & EDUCATION CENTER REOPENED

After a soft opening in mid-December, the "Ding" Darling Visitor & Education Center reopened most of the interactive exhibits that had been barriered off since pandemic lockdown in March 2020. It also debuted the long-awaited Artist-in-Residence exhibition in the auditoriums in a gallery format with occasional appearances by artist Rachel Pierce. She will be showing pieces inspired by her artist-in-residence tenure since late 2019, which has been extended because of COVID interruptions. The exhibition will remain through February, to be followed by the art of Lori Lawrence in March and April.

By federal decree, masks are still required in all government Refuge buildings.



Back and ready for curious hands to explore, the interactive exhibits reopened mid-December.

DDWS Year of the Anhinga, Soaring for 40 More

Forty years of supporting Refuge conservation, research, and education — that's huge! When we look back at all we have accomplished in the first 40 years of the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society — from a new Visitor & Education Center in 1999 to the most recent acquisition of 8.5 acres of land at the end of last year — we can't help but be proud. We are not resting on our laurels, however.

We have a lot more up under our wings as 2022 unfolds and a new era of exciting growth with it.

We cannot spill all our secrets yet, but we can tell you that we plan on closing on the new Refuge parcel later this month, and we are excited to tell you more about its location and important habitat. Thanks to island residents Don and Joan Sherman for extending

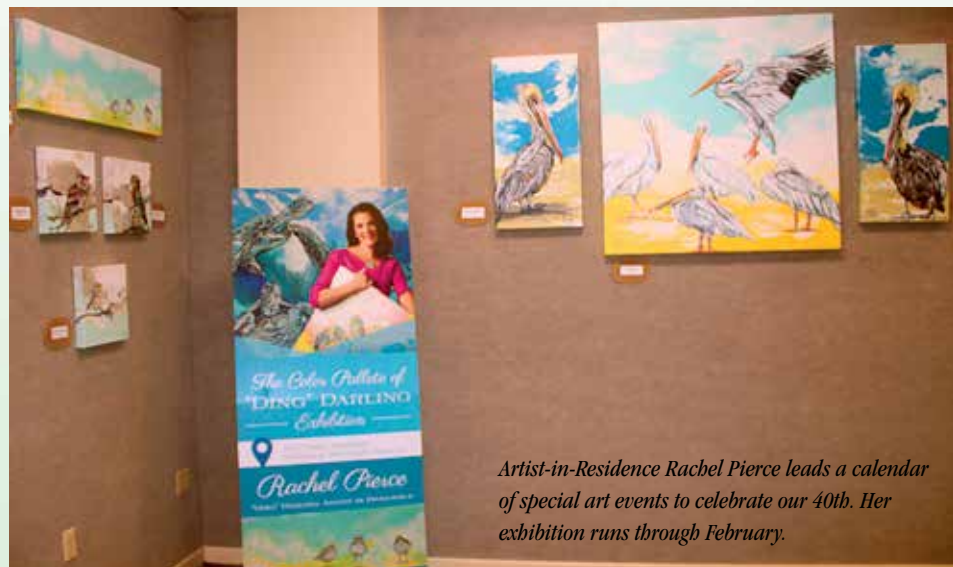


a \$550,000 challenge match that quickly earned us the final funding for the property, and thanks to everyone who realized the importance of contributing to such a worthwhile cause: saving another piece of Sanibel.

We will be celebrating that and more (hint: a big surprise!) at our 2022 Go Wild for "Ding" — Year of the Anhinga, Soar for 40 More fundraiser on February 9 at

The Community House. Watch for announcements when tickets go on sale, because this event always sells out early — just as our "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament already has. The May 13 event celebrates 10 years. The tradition continues, and all tournament spots sold out within hours

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Artist-in-Residence Rachel Pierce leads a calendar of special art events to celebrate our 40th. Her exhibition runs through February.

'Ding' Darling-Theodore Cross Photo Contest

The ninth annual "Ding" Darling-Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest has kicked off with a deadline of February 15, 2022. It invites high school students in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, and Hendry counties to compete for prizes that include a Canon digital SLR camera package, special photography opportunities to be announced, and copies of *Waterbirds: Portraits and Anecdotes from Birding Adventures* by contest namesake, the late Theodore Cross.

Cross, who lived part-time on Sanibel Island, marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; advised the Johnson and Nixon administrations on anti-poverty programs; wrote the influential book *Black Capitalism*, among others; played a prominent role in President Obama's election; and created Birders United — a birding Web site that ranked legislators according to their record of bird protection support.


Late in life, Cross decided to indulge his love for birds and photography and traveled the world to collect stunning portraits and stories to chronicle his adventures. He shot often at the Refuge, and a number of the images in his book reflect his love for "Ding" Darling. Cross published *Waterbirds* in 2009 at age 85 to great acclaim; he passed away shortly after that in February 2010, just two weeks after he made a presentation at "Ding" Darling as part of its annual lecture series.



Rbeannon Hill from Lehigh Senior High won first place in the 2020-2021 contest with "Flowers."

"We are so happy to be supporting a contest in my father's name, a contest that will get our youth involved with nature by looking at it — as my father so loved doing —

through a camera lens," said daughter Amanda Cross.

For entry rules and guidelines, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests or call 239-472-1100 ext. 4. 



Urban Education Leader Melissa Maher teaches Sunshine State curriculum during visits to area schools.

WoW! What a Year


It hardly seems possible that we debuted our WoW Wildlife on Wheels mobile classroom less than a year ago. Considering we have reached more than 7,600 students and 300 summer camp attendees since its first engagements in February, its impact far surpasses what we had hoped. But there's more to the story than

numbers. WoW has changed lives. Teachers tell us so. Students show us so.

Besides schools and camps, WoW has made appearances at community centers and events at "Ding" Darling, always drawing an appreciative crowd to explore its hands-on exhibits and learn about nature and the Ref-

uge in an impactful way. We are excited to announce that WoW will be part of the Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade on February 19, so watch for us to be all lit up.

One of WoW's most impactful engagements involves a Refuge mission to engage with Tice Elementary, a Title 1 school in Fort Myers, and its community. The WoW team delivered school supplies for all students in the fall to level the playing field as they started the school year. They also spent most of November at the school and ultimately supported a turkey food drive that provided Thanksgiving dinner for 500 families of students and staff. The WoW-Tice connection continues into 2022 as DDWS Suzanne Dubuc Community Connector Maria Santiago (a newly funded position) leads a Community Action Team to discover more ways to meet the needs of Tice and the wider urban area where we can connect conservation with community.

"We always expected WoW would make a difference when we first conceived it," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. "We never expected how gratifying and heartwarming it would be to see the smiles and sudden expressions of 'getting nature' that we see on faces wherever we go. Congratulation and thanks to DDWS, Urban Education Leader Melissa Maher, our energetic and bilingual WoW interns and volunteers, and everyone involved." 

April 24: 'Ding' Darling Day @ Lakes Park Rescheduled



Last October, we had to postpone our 33rd annual "Ding" Darling Day Conservation Carnival due to a surge in COVID numbers. We have rescheduled it for Sunday, April 24. As originally planned, to further the Refuge mission to reach and connect with underserved urban communities, we're migrating the celebration to Lakes Park in Fort Myers. The Refuge — in partnership with DDWS, Tarpon Bay Explorers recreation concession, conservation partners, and sponsors — is drawing up a schedule of tours and ongoing activities from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. that day. Visit dingdarlingday.com for more details.

DDWS still seeks sponsors for the event, which will be highly publicized throughout the Southwest Florida area. Contact April Boehnen at april@dingdarlingsociety.org or 239-472-1100 ext. 4 for more information.



Visit WoW and enjoy hands-on activities at "Ding" Darling Day.

New Board Members, Officers

At its December 1 annual meeting, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society Board of Directors welcomed two Sanibel Island residents as new members: Nancy Felker and Stuart R. Sergeant.

It also reelected members Sarah Ashton, Barb Blue-dorn, David Jeffrey, and Dick Levinson. The Board later elected officers President Sarah Ashton, Vice President Wendy Kindig, Secretary Robin Kirk, and Treasurer Bill Valerian.

Nancy, a practicing pharmacist for 34 years for family pharmacies in Illinois and later in Arkansas, retired in 2017. She has been visiting Sanibel Island since age 4, when she developed an early love for birds and nature. With her husband, Dave, she has owned property on Sanibel since 2014, and still lives part-time in North-west Arkansas.

"I will soon be volunteering again at the Nature Store," said Nancy. "I enjoy talking to the visitors about what they saw in the Refuge and where they have traveled from. I believe the motto 'The more you know, the more you love, the more you want to protect. The Wildlife Society does such an excellent job of encouraging education.'"

Stuart works as a litigation attorney for Swanson, Martin & Bell in Chicago, Illinois, and owns the On



Nancy Felker and Stuart R. Sergeant

Island boutique on Sanibel with his wife, Kate. He volunteers for the Sanibel and Captiva Kiwanis Club and formerly as an Island Youth sports coach.

"I love the outdoors and spending free time fishing, hunting, and mountain biking with my family," said Stuart. "I am excited to be a part of an organization that plays a key role in keeping Sanibel as we all know it: the perfect place to live and visit."

"We welcome Nancy and Stuart into the fold, confident that they will bring their passion for nature and energy for volunteering to help move the Board into a new year of continued admirable support for the Refuge," said Sarah Ashton.

UPCOMING "DING" EVENTS

Rachel Pierce Artist-in-Residence Exhibition

Through February 28, 2022

2022 "Ding" Darling Lecture Series

February 4-March 25, 2022

Wellness Week: Mind, Body, Heart

February 7-12, 2022

Go Wild for "Ding" - Year of the Anhinga, Soar for 40 More

February 9, 2022

Walk for 'Ding' Challenge

March 1-April 10, 2022

Lori Lawrence Art Exhibition

March 1 - April 30, 2022

Project Refuge: A Couture Fashion Show Using Trash

March 31, 2022

"Ding" Darling Day Conservation Carnival @ Lakes Park

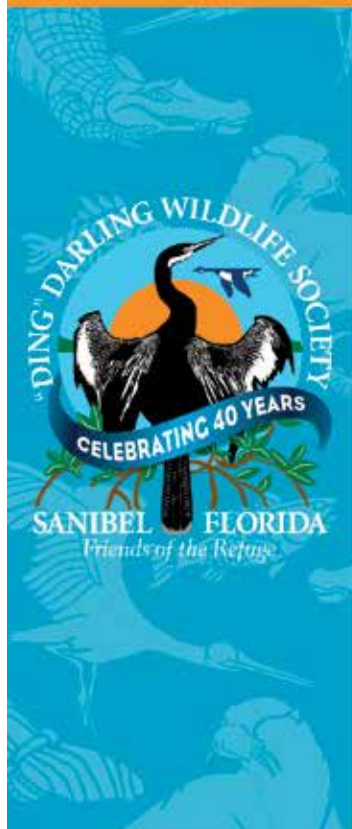
April 24, 2022

10th Annual "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament

May 13, 2022

Niki Butcher Art Exhibition

November 15-December 31, 2022



2022 Free Lecture Series

The 18th annual “Ding” Darling Lecture Series brings seven authors and wildlife and art experts to Sanibel Island February 4 through March 25. Lectures will cover topics from Bald Eagles to ornithotherapy and nature art.

Due to the uncertainty of ongoing COVID-19 restrictions at the “Ding” Darling Visitor & Education Center, five of the lectures this year are again scheduled at The Community House at 2173 Periwinkle Way on Sanibel Island. The venue for the other two will be later determined.



Internationally acclaimed birder, photographer, and prolific award-winning author of *The Crossley ID Guides*, Richard Crossley kicks off the series on February 4.

The free lectures will occur on six Fridays and one Thursday throughout the season. Most start at 10 a.m. DDWS will be filming most lectures and broadcasting them on YouTube and dingdarlingsociety.org the following week for those unable to attend.

Seating for the free lectures is limited on a first-come basis. About 200 socially distanced seats will be available. Guests must wear face masks and submit to having their temperature taken before entering.

Note: Opinions expressed in guest lectures do not necessarily reflect the views of Refuge and DDWS management, staff, and Board of Directors.

Below is the calendar of scheduled lectures and their sponsors. Book-signings will follow all lectures, most of which start at 10 a.m. at The Community House, unless otherwise indicated.

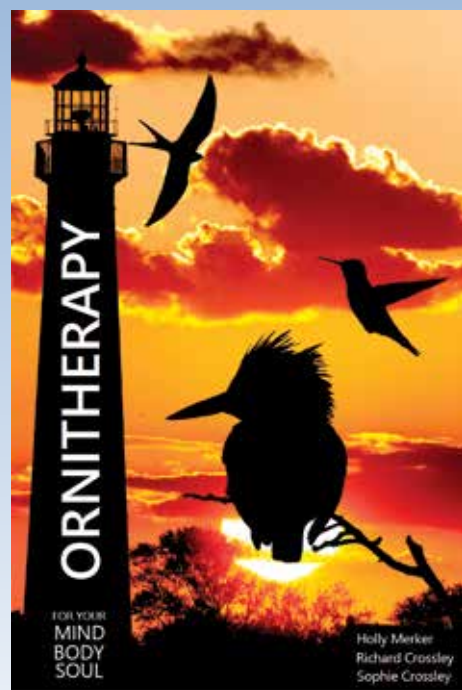
February 4 – Author Richard Crossley, *The Past, Present and Future of Conservation through Birding* (co-sponsors: Anonymous, HighTower/Thomas & Swartz Wealth Management)

February 11 – Author Holly Merker, *Ornithotherapy: How a Deeper Experience with Nature Can Enrich Your Mind, Body, and Soul* (co-sponsors: Anonymous, Joseph & Michelle Blanda)

February 24 (Thursday) – Amy Urich, *The Captivating Art and Times of My Father, Ikki Matsumoto* (sponsors: Bill and Laurie Harkey)

March 4 time and place TBD – Author Doug Chadwick, *Four Fifths a Grizzly: A New Perspective on Nature that Just Might Save Us All* (co-sponsors: Diane Esslinger, The Jenni & Kyle Foundation)

March 11 time and place TBD – Author David Allen Sibley, *What It's Like to Be a Bird: From Flying to Nesting, Eating to Singing—What Birds Are Doing, and Why* (co-sponsors: Stan & Connie Grayson, HighTower/Thomas & Swartz Wealth Management, Drs. John & Wendy Kindig)



Two of this season's speakers – Richard Crossley and Holly Merker – contributed to *Ornithotherapy: Changing Your Heart, Mind, Soul*.

March 18 – Author Jack Davis, *The Bald Eagle: The Improbable Journey of America's Bird* (co-sponsors: Pat Appino, Sonya Keene & John Moy, In Appreciation of the DDWS Staff Donor, In Memory of Roddy West)

March 25 – Author Stan Tekiela, *Bird Nests: Amazingly Ingenious and Intricate* (Sponsors: Vortex Optics, A Fellow Minnesotan, The Jenni & Kyle Foundation)

A Toast to Wild Daze Ale

The December 4 rollout of the 40th anniversary, limited-edition Wild Daze Ale brought a launch party at partner Fort Myers Brewing Co. and tasting events at Bailey's General Store on Sanibel, which was one of six venues to carry the beer. Others included Doc Ford's



Beer merch is available at all three Nature Store outlets.

Rum Bar & Grille's Sanibel, Captiva, and Fort Myers restaurants; Sanibel Captiva Beach Resorts' Oasis Pool Bar at Tween Waters Beach Resort and Upper Deck at West Wind Inn; and The Timbers Restaurant & Fish Market.

“Our goal for Wild Daze was to expand ‘Ding’ Darling’s appeal to a wider, young, multi-cultural audience in a fresh, new way,” said Birgie Miller, DDWS Executive Director. “That included engaging a Latina artist, originally from Miami, to design our label.”

At press time, supplies were running out quickly as beer-lovers were buying up the smooth and light-bodied golden ale. Wild Daze Ale merchandise, however,



is still available at the flagship Refuge Nature Store in the Visitor & Education Center, Nature Store2 at 2250 Periwinkle Way on Sanibel, and the ShopDingDarling.com e-commerce store. Buy your Wild Daze pint glasses, coozies, coasters, T-shirts, and stickers from any location. All profits benefit conservation efforts at the Refuge.

'Ding' Day Photo Contest Winners

Although "Ding" Darling Day was postponed in October due to COVID, the 29th annual "Ding" Darling Day Amateur Nature Photography Contest went on. Judges selected three winners and eight honorable mentions out of 118 entries from 18 states and two countries. All photograph entries were shot at the Refuge complex.

First place went to Doug Meurer of Fort Myers, Florida, for his portrait titled "Roseate Spoonbill & Reddish Egret." Contest judge and Refuge Manager Kevin Godsea commented: "I love the colorful and playful nature of this photograph, as well as the variety of subject matter and the action it portrays."

In second place was Kathleen Colligan from Bokeelia, Florida, with a photograph titled "Tri-colored Heron with its Reflection." "I particularly am drawn to the dark and light contrast in this photo, the composition, the framing of the mangrove branches, and the reflections on the water," said Karen Watson, a parttime Sanibel resident and interior designer.

Donald Howe from Savannah, Georgia, took third place with a photo of a Snowy Egret drinking, titled "Blowin' Bubbles." "I like the contrast between the dark water and the white feathers of the Snowy Egret as well as the photograph's composition," said judge Susan Beittel, a Refuge volunteer subbing for *News-Press* photographer Kinfa Moroti, who had to cancel that day due to illness.

"We always choose three judges for the contest," said Terry Baldwin, a DDWS Emeritus Board Member who coordinates the contest. "They include a Refuge staff



DID YOU KNOW?

Formerly known as the Louisiana Heron, the Tri-colored Heron is the only dark-colored heron with a white belly.

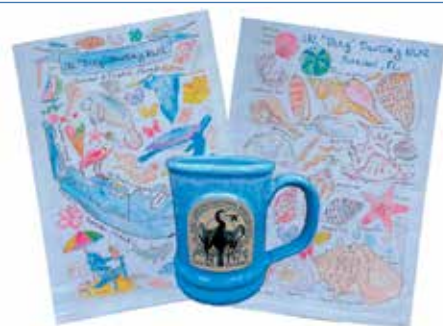
Kathleen Colligan's "Tri-colored Heron with its Reflection" took second place.

member, a professional photographer, and a member of the Sanibel community."

Visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests to view all the winning photos and find information for entering the photo contest in 2022.



Donald Howe won third place with "Blowin' Bubbles."



CELEBRATE OUR 40TH WITH A SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY GIFT ITEM.

**THE "DING" DARLING
NATURE STORES**

SHOPDINGDARLING.COM

1 WILDLIFE DRIVE
2250 PERIWINKLE WAY
SANIBEL, FL
(239) 472-1100 EXT. 241

MEMORIAL AND HONOR GIFTS

September 1, 2021 – December 15, 2021

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:

John & Kathy Allen
Adaline H. Allen
Linda Almira
Paul D. Andrews
Marjorie Athey
Harriet E. Babineaux
Irma & Don Badgley
Anthony Bahas
Clara & Vernon Baltus
Beverly Ball
Jane Barrett
Andrew Barton
Bernice L. Bay

Diane Biehler
Harold M. Bixby
Evelyn Steudle Borshay
William A. Brown
Leroy Butler
Barbara Ann Carter
Joan Chiamonte
Monty Coleman
Carolyn Copeland
Rosalie Courter
Donald L. Cross
Mary Sue Denk
Dr. David Drachman

Richard Durst
Kendra Eager
Tom Edgar
Gerald Fondessy
Elizabeth Gardner
Elizabeth Gazda-Smith
Wayne Reid Goforth
Stuart Grinnell
Jean Haffenreffer
Allison Hagerup
Louise ter Horst
John "Jack" Covert, III
Dr. George Irwin
Carol Anne Jackson
Elaine Jacobson
Patrick Andrew Jeffrey
Pam Keith
John & Priscilla Kennedy
Helen Mayme Koehler
Larry & Charlotte Kowitch
Patty Hennings Krepin
Flo & Eugene Krepin
Ted Kucera
Dorothy Kwicklis
Mary Alice Lage

Sue V. Lair
Jeanette Leff
Dr. David Link
Jim & Linda McCoy
John A McCloud
Barbara McGary
Sue McIntyre
Gordon & Cecil McLelland
Robert G. Meeker
Mesa
Hermie Miller
Esther Miseroy
Kathryn & Wayne Overholser
Shepard Palmer & Shirley Found
Angelika Pontynen
Kris Postlmayr
Hal & Verna Postlmayr
Rev. Richard D. Rintala
Anne Rubin
Shemon Sander
Carol Saunders
Edwin Schrank
Garold Allen Schudel
Dee Serage

Dean Smith
John Spencer
Edward J Stanek
Warren Stanton
Ann & Glen Stewart
Gene Steele

Irene A. Stoesser
Thomas B. Stoel
Mary Turner
Bob Vantdahl
Hans Wagner
Bertram & Marilyn Zheutlin

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

Jeff & Karla Arnold
Sarah Pullins & Matthew Blume
Martha & James Boland
Byrne Family
Barbara Cline
Jeff Combs
John, Beth & Elizabeth Gunter
Lucy & Edward Hand
Doris D. Hardy
George E. Hervey
Vicki Horning
Ellis Kelleher
Lucinda Buhse Kinsley
Robin Kirk
Tom & Peggy Meehan

Birgie Miller
Paula Reiss
Adam & Sarah Lathrop Sauerland
Philip Scheiber
Shirley Schiffman
Missy & Tony Scoville
Jim Sprinkle
Les & Janice Verhoek
Barbara Verneray
Ann-Marie Wildman
Matthew B. Wills
Julia R. Wills
Florida Fish & Wildlife
Jean M. Wolf
John & Martha Wolf

INCLUDE

Ding

IN YOUR WILL OR ESTATE

PROTECT THE FUTURE... NOW.

Ensuring wildlife has a place to thrive in the future is as easy as naming "Ding" Darling in your will, or designating it as a beneficiary to your retirement plan, IRA, or other financial account.

AN EASY WAY TO GIVE...

- There is no minimum amount for the gift.
- You can change your plans at any time.
- Help protect "Ding" Darling and its wildlife and inspire future generations to do the same.

HOW TO WORD IT:

I give, devise, and bequeath to The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, Inc., a Florida non-profit corporation located on Sanibel Island, Florida [written amount or percentage of the estate or description of property] for [designate the purpose, if desired, or leave blank for gifts to be used to address the greatest need].



WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU

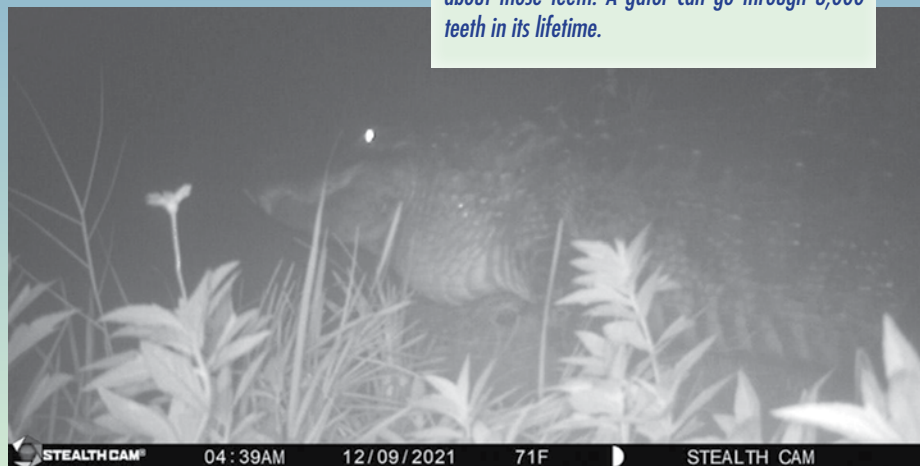
239-472-1100 EXT. 4 dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/include-ding-in-your-will

WILDLIFE SPOTLIGHT

What lurks there in the darkness of an early Refuge morning? Look for its glowing eye to distinguish this American Alligator captured by a Refuge motion-activated trail camera, supported by multiple donors for Refuge research.

DID YOU KNOW?

This photo reveals one fun fact about the American Alligator: Its eyes glow in the dark. But let's talk about those teeth. A gator can go through 3,000 teeth in its lifetime.



Wellness Week: Mind. Body. Heart.

As part of its 40th anniversary celebration this year and to connect individuals with the natural world, DDWS has announced Wellness Week: Mind. Body. Heart., February 7-12, in partnership with the Refuge; Tarpon Bay Explorers (TBE), the Refuge recreation concession; and the Sanibel Rec Center's Heart Healthy Month.

Highlights of the week will include a ribbon cutting for the new self-guided Mindfulness Trail at the Bailey Tract with the Sanibel & Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce, a ranger-led bike tour of Wildlife Drive, sunrise yoga at the beach, guest expert speakers on healing through nature, special activities at TBE, and guided mindfulness walks.



"Wellness Week makes that connection between physical and mental health and the healing properties of being out in the natural world," said Jessica Barry, DDWS Development & Outreach Assistant and project leader. "We are excited to debut our Mindfulness Trail, which has been something so close to my heart since I joined the Refuge staff as an intern in 2020."

"We are grateful for Jess and others for encouraging us to enhance the work at the Refuge in the area of true mindfulness in nature," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger

Toni Westland. "It has resulted in this wonderful Bailey Tract trail with QR codes and podcasts so hikers can self-guide their mindful journey. We also welcome three visiting certified forest therapy guides, who will be leading hikes and presentations that week."

Guest presenters include Dr. Joseph Blanda, a recently retired orthopedic surgeon who now helps people with well-being and mindfulness; Cristina Shaul, who leads guided meditation and mindfulness walks; and Kim Sowinski, who teaches ayurveda-inspired nature yoga in Cleveland, Ohio.

For more information and a schedule of activities during Wellness Week, visit dingwellness.com.

TARPON BAY EXPLORERS

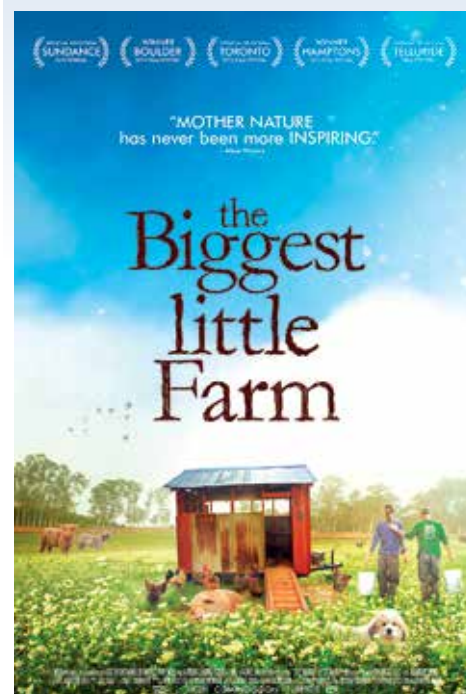
The Refuge recreation concession offers tram tours of Wildlife Drive, paddling and nature cruise tours, and fishing charters, plus rentals of bikes, kayaks, paddleboards, canoes, and pontoon boats. Visit tarponbayexplorers.com or call 239-472-8900 for a schedule and to make reservations.

Film Series Planning Underway



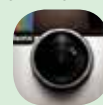
January and February bring a new film series for 2022, and the DDWS team is busy viewing and selecting. To let you in on what's in store, we highlight here two of the documentaries we're excited about. Award-winning *The Biggest Little Farm* chronicles the eight-year journey of John and Molly Chester as they trade city living for 200 acres of barren farmland and a dream to harvest in harmony with nature. The documentary *2040* presents a story of hope that looks at the very real possibility that humanity could reverse global warming and improve the lives of every living thing in the process.

Films will be available to viewers on various platforms; post-film discussions will take place via Zoom. Stay tuned to dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/lecture-and-film-series as we flesh out the details.



Now on TikTok FOLLOW US!

To "like" us on **Facebook** (along with more than 17,000 others), search for "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society. (You can also "like" the Refuge by searching for its "Official" page.) Follow us on **Instagram**, where we have 17,700-plus followers, at [@dingdarlingwildlifesociety](https://www.instagram.com/dingdarlingwildlifesociety). Our new **TikTok** page is garnering giggles and appreciation; hop aboard at [@dingdarlingsociety](https://www.tiktok.com/@dingdarlingsociety). Also visit our **YouTube** channel by searching "ding darling wildlife society."



STAFF NEWS

Store Manager Promotion

Christopher Galloway recently accepted a promotion from Nature Store Assistant Manager to Manager of DDWS' two physical and one online store. Chris began working for DDWS in December 2016 and has also held the position as Assistant Office Manager, plus assists in IT matters, including leading the set-up of ShopDing-Darling.com last year. He steps into the position formerly held by Ann-Marie Wildman, who will be moving into the new role of DDWS Impact Officer.



"I feel privileged to have this fantastic team to work with, and to be stewards for the Refuge," said Chris. "We've made great strides in the past couple of years despite challenges, and I anticipate that we will continue pushing forward in our efforts."

When COVID-19 temporarily shut down the original flagship Refuge Nature Store in the "Ding" Darling Visitor & Education Center in 2020, the DDWS team moved ahead to promote its fledgling e-commerce site and open a second store at 2250 Periwinkle Way, which also serves as a fulfillment center for online orders.

Urban Ranger Joins 'Ding' Darling Staff

The Refuge welcomed Urban Ranger Janet Sokowloski in November as part of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Urban Outreach initiative to expand the mission of national wildlife refuges into the community, especially to low-income neighborhoods that don't typically have the resources to interact with refuge wildlife and conservation ethics.



"At 'Ding' Darling, we have led the FWS movement for urban outreach through various programs, most notably our WoW, Wildlife on Wheels interactive mobile classroom," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who heads up the Refuge's outreach efforts. "WoW has received rave reviews and lots of love from our local Title 1 schools such as Tice Elementary, where we have recently concentrated efforts. Federal budget cuts have taxed staff in keeping WoW vital, but the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society has helped make it possible by funding the construction of WoW and its staffing. With Janet now coming aboard as a federally supported member of the team, it's a huge relief and asset to our mission."

Janet comes to Sanibel from Fort Benning, Georgia, where she worked as an operations and resource manager, scheduling federal land and airspace to train and test weapons. A veteran of the war in the Middle East,

she taught marksmanship to allies in Afghanistan. She was born in Massachusetts to Dominican Republic parents and is fluent in Spanish.

"We hired Janet based on her skill set, passion, organizational skills, lengthy 20 years' experience teaching diverse audiences, and eagerness to learn," said Ranger Toni.

Janet looks forward to showing and educating people who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to discover the joys of being outdoors and finding peace. She moved to Southwest Florida with her husband, a retiree from the Army after 22 years of service.

New Education Staffing

In an unprecedented partnership with the Lee County School District, the Refuge and DDWS negotiated the sharing of an Environmental Education Resource Teacher. Educator John Bailey began his role coordinating conservation education programs with the Refuge in October through the district's Curriculum & Instructional Innovation Department.



"We are super excited to have this resource in our toolbox to assist with our heightened onsite and outreach education efforts this school year," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who helped engineer the partnership. "John has the background and energy that make him a perfect fit with the 'Ding' education team."

Since 2017, the Refuge education team has been fortified through support from DDWS. That year, the nonprofit friends group hired a professional Environmental Educator to replace a position that was cut from the budget by the federal government. John Bailey fills that position, now jointly funded by DDWS and the school district. He will be driving busloads of district students to the Refuge for onsite field trips and will interpret their tours through Wildlife Drive.

"This is a shining example of what can be accomplished through community partnerships," said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. "Thanks to creative thinking on Toni's part and a lot of brainstorming with Refuge and school district staff, we see a brilliant solution to busing issues and the federal budget cuts that have threatened to cripple the Refuge's mission to educate and mold conservation stewards of the future."

Harkey Development & Communications Intern

Thanks to the first ever permanently endowed intern fund at 'Ding,' Hayley Caylor from Seminole, Florida, joins the DDWS team as the Harkey Development & Communications Intern. Sanibel residents Laurie and Bill Harkey set up this fund, which will guarantee ongoing funding for one intern annually into perpetuity.

"Laurie and I have always been fans of the outdoors and wildlife, and this is a way to support public educa-



Bill Harkey, Hayley Caylor, and Laurie Harkey

tion and environmental and wildlife protection while we are still around to see the results," said Bill Harkey, who serves on the DDWS Board of Directors. "We see what these internships do for the students and their future careers but also what they do to help both the Refuge and friends group in their important conservation work. The interns bring a fresh perspective and are mentored to be our next conservation stewards, wherever their career takes them."

Originally from Fredericksburg, Virginia, Hayley graduated from Eckerd College in St. Petersburg in May with a degree in environmental studies and a minor in sustainability. In Seminole, she worked as a shorebird steward intern, monitoring black skimmers on Pinellas County beaches.

"I'm so grateful to the Harkeys for making my term at 'Ding' Darling possible," said Hayley. "I think my favorite part of the Refuge is just how many species there are. You never know what you're going to see. It is incredibly exciting to be in a place that puts wild Florida first and that is actively working to protect these priceless natural spaces that have disappeared in other parts of the state."

Permanently endowed internship funds can be established for \$200,000 or more. Please contact DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 for more information.

Jim & Liz Birmingham 2022 Visitor Services Intern

Tucker Phillips recently joined the Refuge team as a Jim & Liz Birmingham 2022 Visitor Services Intern, working fulltime with Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland through the 2021-2022 season. He arrived from his hometown Herndon, Virginia, a graduate of George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, where he majored in environmental science with a concentration in conservation.



The Birminghams, of Sanibel Island and Colorado, have donated in support of an annual Refuge internship and other areas of need at the Refuge. They have been coming to Sanibel for many years and believe in the importance of supporting the communities where they live, especially when it comes to giving the younger generation an appreciation for conservation.

Internship Support

DDWS provides living stipends and other benefits for about a dozen interns each year. The Refuge supports interns with free housing. We currently steward two named internships for the 2021-2022 year and are accepting donations for three future named intern funds at \$12,500 a year, which is the cost for supporting one intern including stipends, travel, tolls, Sanibel Rec Center membership, and other expenses.

For information about supporting the Refuge Internship Program, contact DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4.

New DDWS Intern

Christina Hester from Pembroke Pines, Florida, has joined the DDWS team. The Florida native graduated December 2019 from Florida International University in Miami with a double major in journalism and philosophy. Before coming to Sanibel Island, she worked at the YMCA in her suburban hometown as a member engagement representative and also freelanced as an artist and media editor.



"The Refuge is one of the most beautiful locations ever," said Christina, who has quickly become enamored by the island's beaches and their seashells. "I feel so fortunate that I get to be here every day and appreciate the serenity that doesn't exist on my side of the state."

"Our interns bring youthful energy, enthusiasm, and creativity to the Refuge team and in turn learn about nonprofit and refuge operations," said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. "Our friends group works hard to assist the Refuge, through monetary support, with conservation work and messaging, community outreach, and programmatic and staffing needs. These are all important skills our interns learn and take with them into their professional lives."

Two generous donors from Pennsylvania privately funded Christina's position.

Suzanne Dubuc Community Connector

Maria Santiago holds a position of high respect and trust in the Tice community of Fort Myers. Besides serving as the cultural studies teacher at the elementary school, the Puerto Rican native has developed working and personal relationships with local churches, daycare and community centers, and surrounding businesses.

For Refuge volunteer John MacLennan, Maria's energy and love of nature remind him of his late wife, Suzanne Dubuc, who was passionate about teaching kids, especially those in disadvantaged communities around the U.S.

"Like Suzanne, Maria is an educator and community connector," said Toni Westland, Supervisory Ref-



Maria Santiago with John MacLennan

uge Ranger, who leads 'Ding' Darling's Urban Refuge outreach initiative. "She always has been there to help 'Ding' Darling with Tice Elementary this school year, when we were purchasing school supplies this fall, spending most of November at the school with the WoW mobile classroom, and pitching in on Thanksgiving dinner for 500 families."

When John learned about the Refuge's wish to support a part-time Community Connector position as a liaison between "Ding" Darling and Tice, he generously funded Maria in that role for this school year. As a knowledgeable and active community member, Maria will be facilitating the formation of a Community Action Team to determine future projects the Refuge and WoW educators are planning to support Tice Elementary, a Title 1 school, and the surrounding area, in terms of conservation and community needs.

"Suzanne would embrace a person of such high energy and dedication to children as Maria Santiago obviously is," said John. "Her life was dedicated to providing the best in education for elementary students."

Suzanne taught in a rural South Carolina school as segregation was ending, served as principal of a multi-cultural Catholic school in Hawaii, provided teachers and parents in New England with hard-to-find teaching materials, and created an adult-oriented English skills program for Haitian workers in the Fort Myers area.

"We are excited to see Suzanne's passion for education continue with this important mission of urban outreach and inspiring future conservation stewards," said Birgie Miller, DDWS Executive Director. "Philanthropy makes the difference in what we can accomplish in this area, and it is an honor to have the memory of Suzanne Dubuc shared in this way."

New Title for Jess

Former Visitor Services and WoW Intern extraordinaire Jessica Barry took a new role as part-time DDWS Development & Outreach Assistant in October. You will find Jess in the reception area of the DDWS offices, greeting visitors and working with the team on a number of development and outreach tasks and projects. We are so happy to have Jess staying on.



YEAR OF ANHINGA

continued from page 1

last month. Already, in its nine years, the tournament has raised \$755,000 to support conservation work at the Refuge.

February also brings our first-ever Wellness Week: Mind. Body. Heart. event. Read more about it and the debut of our self-guided Mindfulness Trail at Bailey Tract on page 7. Another opportunity to celebrate getting outdoors in nature, "Ding" Darling Day Conservation Carnival was moved from October 2021 to April 24, 2022, because of the fall COVID surge. To be held at Lakes Park in Fort Myers in our determined urban outreach efforts, the free celebration centers around our WoW Wildlife on Wheels mobile nature experience and carnival games with a wildlife twist.

Have a look at page 3 in this newsletter to discover all of the anniversary activities we have planned for this season. We're bringing back Project Refuge: A Couture Fashion Show Using Trash on March 31 to celebrate our 40th, plus the 2022 Lecture Series and Film Series promise the finest speakers and cinematography relating to birds, nature and health, art, and other relevant topics.

As we look back at 2021 — when we kicked off our 40th anniversary with the rollout of limited-edition Wild Daze Ale beer, initiated our first TikTok social media efforts, and greeted the reopening of the Visitor & Education Center with an art exhibition featuring Artist-in-Residence Rachel Pierce — we glow with happiness from the partnerships and generous sponsors and donors who have made it all possible. Happy anniversary to us! Overwhelming gratitude to you.

Watch dingdarlingsociety.org events to learn more as plans unfold for the 40th anniversary celebration and to learn how to support needs for land acquisition, habitat restoration, education, and biology staffing. Many thanks to 40th Anniversary Committee Chairs Terry Baldwin and Dick Levinson for their work.



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DID YOU KNOW?

Like humans, Roseate Spoonbills too experience balding on top of their heads as they age.

PHOTO CONTEST 2021

DDWS announced the winners of the 2021 "Ding" Darling Day Amateur Nature Photography Contest in November. First place went to Doug Meurer of Fort Myers for his portrait titled "Roseate Spoonbill & Reddish Egret." See page 5 for more information on the 29th annual contest and its winners.