

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release.

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Caption: Holly Merker espouses communion with nature to benefit mind, body, and soul.

‘Ding’ lecturer addresses ornithery, health benefits of mindful nature experiences

Learn why getting your daily dose of ornithery is just what the doctor ordered at a lecture by author, art therapist, and environmental educator Holly Merker at her upcoming free lecture on Friday, Feb. 11, for the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS).

“Ornithery: How a Deeper Experience with Nature Can Enrich Your Mind, Body, and Soul” will take place at The Community House at 2173 Periwinkle Way on Sanibel Island starting at 10 a.m.

As part of DDWS’ 40th Anniversary Wellness Week: Mind. Body. Heart. Feb. 7-12, Merker’s presentation explores a mindful approach to the observation of birds and how it benefits our holistic health and well-being. Based on the book *Ornithery: For Your Mind, Body, and Soul*, which she co-published with Richard and Sophie Crossley in 2021, Merker will talk about how allowing birds and nature to slow us down actively reduces stress, depression, and anxiety, while helping to build a stronger heart and immune system.

Merker has worked as a professional birding instructor for National Audubon, the American Birding Association, and other organizations. Passionate about connecting young people to birds, she co-founded the Frontiers in Ornithology Symposium, and has facilitated young birder groups and teen birding camps.

Dedicated to bird conservation, Merker has been state coordinator and reviewer for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s eBird Pennsylvania since 2005 and a two-term voting member and chair of the PA Ornithological Records Committee. She is currently promoting the practice of ornithery across the U.S.

This season’s “Ding” Darling Lecture Series evolves with the times and persisting distance protocols by presenting at a larger off-refuge venue.

DDWS hosts the 18th annual lecture series, and Joseph and Michelle Blanda and an anonymous donor sponsor Merker's lecture. The complete remaining schedule is listed below; book signings follow all lectures.

Socially distanced seating for the free lectures is limited and available on a first-come basis. Staff will be taking temperatures and distributing a limited number of entry wristbands to attendees beginning at 9 a.m. that day. Guests must be wearing wristbands and facemasks to enter the lecture room. Early arrivals may save their seat and one other with personal items. Saved seats must be filled by 9:45.

Note: Opinions expressed in guest lectures do not necessarily reflect the views of refuge and DDWS management, staff, and board of directors.

Lectures start at 10 a.m. on Fridays at The Community House, unless otherwise indicated.

- Feb. 11 – Author Holly Merker, “Ornithotherapy: How a Deeper Experience with Nature Can Enrich Your Mind, Body, and Soul” (co-sponsors: Anonymous, Joseph & Michelle Blanda)
- Thursday, Feb. 24 – Amy Urich, “The Captivating Art and Times of My Father, Ikki Matsumoto” (sponsors: Bill and Laurie Harkey)
- Time and place TBD March 4 – 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)
- Time and place TBD March 11 – 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)
- 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)

For more information about the 18th annual “Ding” Darling Lecture Series, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/lecture-and-film-series.

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 dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4, or dingdarlingsociety@gmail.com.

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