



WINTER 2021

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.

New Year, New Beer



Artist Emily Alvarez at work on the label for Wild Daze Lager.

We had hoped to toast the "Ding" Darling 75th Anniversary with a privately labeled pilsner beer in partnership with Fort Myers Brewing Company. However, aluminum shortages due to COVID-19 pushed that brand unveiling to late 2021, in time to celebrate DDWS' 40th anniversary. Profits from sales of Wild Daze Lager will benefit

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The WoW team celebrates the long-awaited arrival of the urban outreach classroom.

Adaptations 2020



The Chamber of Commerce and "Ding" team celebrated the grand opening of Nature Store2 on November 20.



Acting Refuge Ranger Kevin Godsea and DDWS President Mike Baldwin load the 75th anniversary memorabilia to be unsealed in 25 years.

Covid couldn't stop the celebration!

Much like nature and wildlife, the Refuge and DDWS figured out how to adapt to a changing world last year. We had more than a year's worth of activities scheduled to broadcast the auspicious occasion of the **"Ding" Darling 75th Anniversary**, but unfortunately coronavirus disrupted many of our plans. Not to be undone, we forged forward, nonetheless, with December 1 events — incorporating October's postponed **"Ding" Darling Day** into the anniversary ceremony. The distanced, self-guided

events of "Ding" Day were safely well-attended.

Despite the pandemic, we achieved a great deal at "Ding" Darling in 2020. In late November, we opened **Nature Store2** as a fulfillment center for ShopDingDarling.com and a new Refuge-branded shopping experience at 2250 Periwinkle Way on Sanibel Island. November 23 brought the soft **reopening of the "Ding" Darling Visitor & Education Center**.

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High School Photo Contest Deadline

January 15 marks the deadline of the eighth annual "Ding" Darling-Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest. 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,

chartered class trips to the Refuge, and copies of *Waterbirds: Portraits and Anecdotes from Birding Adventures* by contest namesake, the late Theodore Cross.

For rules and other entry information, visit dingdarlingsociety/articles/photo-contests.



Theodore Cross



Virginia Bayne from Fort Myers High took first place in the 2020 contest with her photo "Lip Smacking Good."

NEW YEAR, NEW BEER

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wildlife research, education, and conservation at the Refuge.

"For the new year, we're announcing a new beer," said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. "We have a lot to celebrate in 2021, and Wild Daze Lager promises to add sparkle to the celebration. We thank Fort Myers Brewing Company for this spirited collaboration."

JJ Taylor Companies will distribute Wild Daze Lager throughout Southwest Florida to restaurants, bars, and stores. The special brew will be available for a limited window of time — about six months starting in late 2021. The Wild Daze Committee has commissioned a native Miami Latina artist to design an exclusive label for the canned beer.

"Having originated in a bustling city where fruit grows all year 'round, I try to incorporate the abundance of energy and life I grew up surrounded by within my work; this manifests in dynamic composition, brilliant colors, and larger-than-life characters," said artist Emily Alvarez, who grew up near the Florida Everglades. "This beer label will be directly inspired by my experiences with South Florida wetlands."

"Our goal is to expand 'Ding's' appeal to a wider, young, multi-cultural audience in a fresh, new way," said Birgie.

Anyone interested in serving on the Wild Daze Committee or looking for more information about the beer should contact DDWS Development Officer and project leader April Boehnen at 239-472-1100 ext. 4.

Bank of the Islands was a Champion Sponsor.



BIG Thanks to Our 75th Anniversary Sponsors

Call of the Wild Sponsor: Jim & Patty Sprinkle;

Champion Sponsors: Bank of the Islands, Jim & Liz Birmingham, Todd & Barbara Bluedorn, Wayne & Linda Boyd, Boomer Duvin & Family, Rex Martin & Lori Harris, John & Kathy McCabe, Hank & Linda Spire;

Guardian Sponsors: Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille, Margie Furniss & Ed Kfoury, Bill & Laurie Harkey, Bill & Diane Valerian, Willow the Whippet;

Protector Sponsors: Barefoot Charley's Painting Co. LLC, George & Wendy's Seafood Grille, Island Sun, Tiffani Kaliko & John Silvia, William & Barbara Millar, Mitchell's SandCastles, Greg & Linda Scherer, Ron E. & Josephine Smith;

Defender Sponsors: Mike & Terry Baldwin, The Community House, Doug & Sherry Gentry, The Gresham Family, Paul Harmon, Kiwanis Club of Sanibel & Captiva Islands, Sanibel Carts, Sanibel Moorings.



Jim & Patty Sprinkle sponsored the 75th anniversary at the Call of the Wild level.

What Will Season Bring?

That's a good question! We are making big plans for Winter 2021, but the uncertainty of the pandemic prevents us from solidifying dates and details. So, for now, we can only tell you what's on the planning board. Stay in touch with our "Ding" on the Wing weekly email bulletins, Facebook and Instagram pages, and dingdarlingsociety.org to hear the latest on these events:

The **Bi-weekly Wednesday Film Series** is tentatively scheduled January 20 to April 14, featuring seven nature- and conservation-related films. They range from *A Sense of Wonder* about Rachel Carson to *Smog of the Sea*, dealing with the reality of microplastic-filled oceans. Monitor dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/lecture-and-film-series for the latest news about the series. Thanks to Sanibel-Captiva Beach Resorts for its film series sponsorship.

Free Winter Programs usually start in January with Refuge tours and talks into April. Since the Refuge

still awaits government approval to conduct seasonal programs, the schedule is on hold right now. Stay tuned at dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/free-refuge-programs.

Go Wild for Jeopard-Ding is the planned theme for this year's major fundraiser in late February or early March. Watch for details at dingdarlingsociety.org.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Bi-Weekly Film Series — January 20-April 14, 2021

Lecture Series — January 29-March 19, 2021

Clyde Butcher Book-signing — February TBA

Go Wild for Jeopard-Ding — TBA

Earth Day at the Refuge — April 22, 2021

SOLD OUT! Ninth Annual "Ding" Darling & Doc

Ford's Tarpon Tournament — May 14, 2021

Artist-in-Residence Exhibition — October 1-November 10, 2021

Niki Butcher Photographic Exhibition — Mid-November-December 2021

Monitor our COVID-19 page (dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/covid-19) for news of event cancellations.



A Sense of Wonder is a planned highlight of the upcoming film series. It deals with Rachel Carson's fight to defend the natural world.

org/articles/go-wild-for-ding. Contact April Boehnen at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 for information on sponsoring the event.

Meet Our 2021 Artist in Residence Rachel Pierce

"Ding" Darling began its artist-in-residence program in 2019 as part of our 75th Anniversary Celebration, with hopes to continue it each year. Whereas COVID got in the way of those plans in 2020, the Refuge, with support from the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS), is moving forward with hosting Fort Myers artist Rachel Pierce for a 2021 program.

Most well-recognized from her role as former NBC2 morning anchor for five years, Rachel recently retired from TV journalism to devote more time to her passion for art and to her husband and four children.

A lifelong artist, Rachel studied art in college, but eventually segued into broadcast journalism. She moved to Fort Myers in 2015 and became involved in community affairs as an emcee and celebrity artist for charitable events. The latter once more ignited her love for creating her brand of whimsical, colorful, sea-inspired oil and acrylic paintings. She sells her paintings and line of jewelry throughout Southwest Florida, including at DDWS' new Nature Store2, and on her website byrachelpierce.com.

As "Ding" artist in residence, Rachel will appear regularly at the Refuge during 2021 to do pop-up, plein-air painting along Wildlife Drive; teach art to children and adults on-site; live-stream from the Refuge; lead opportunities to paint a canvas with the artist; visit youth facilities to help create art; and end the year

with an exhibition of her Refuge-inspired and other wildlife art from October 1 through November 10, 2021.

Rachel's first refuge appearance took place last year on December 1 for the "Ding" Darling 75th Anniversary "Ding" Darling Day. At that event, she demonstrated her style of nature art outdoors with social distancing.

"I love all things 'Ding!'" said the artist, who last March emceed Project Refuge: A Couture Fashion



The art of Rachel Pierce reflects her love for the sea and nature.

Show Using Trash for the Refuge's 75th Anniversary. "I am always in awe of the wildlife, especially the birds during my visits. I often find my inspiration while there. How fitting and what an exceptional honor to be the artist in residence at the place where I source so many subjects for my artwork. I'm absolutely thrilled to connect to nature, art enthusiasts, 'Ding' supporters, and 'Ding' visitors over the next year. I look forward to sharing with everyone my love for our beautiful Southwest Florida environment and creating artwork reflecting it."

"Our Refuge was created by conservation artist Jay Norwood 'Ding' Darling in 1945, so our artist-in-residence program honors that history and tradition," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. "Darling created the Federal Duck Stamp program and designed the first duck stamp and the refuge system's Blue Goose logo. He won the Pulitzer Prize twice for his political cartoons, which were syndicated across the country throughout the 1920s and four following decades."

The Refuge's artist-in-residence program began in 2019 with Idaho wildlife journal artist Ed Anderson, who worked with children from Quality Life Center of Southwest Florida in Fort Myers and PACE Center for Girls — Lee County plus visitors to the Refuge for his special programs and exhibition.

ADAPTATIONS 2020

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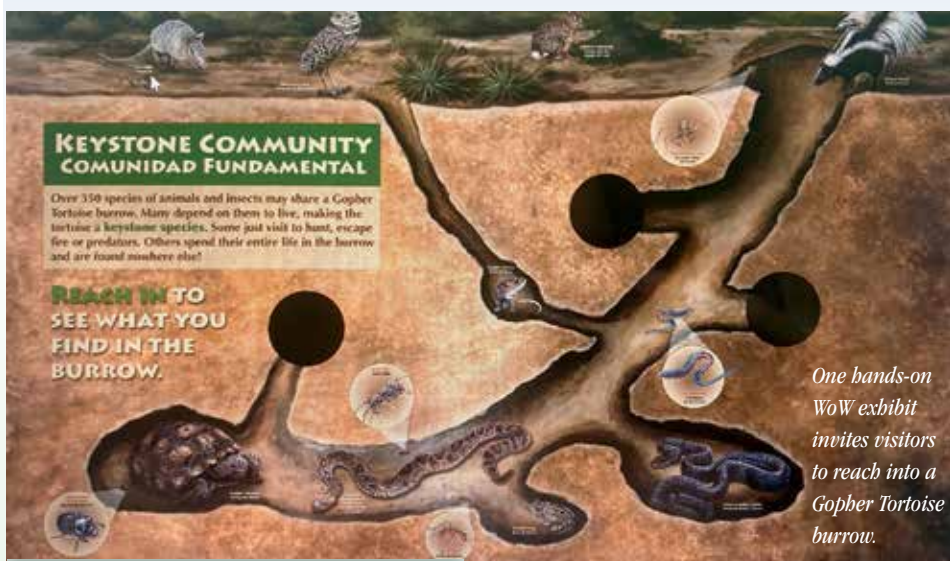
Although our hands-on exhibits remain hands-off, the flagship Refuge Nature Store and front information desk are open and safely staffed.

December 12 marked a major milestone and accomplishment for the team as we unveiled our long-awaited **Wildlife on Wheels (WoW)** urban mobile classroom in a Fort Myers under-represented community with safe tours following CDC guidelines and open to the public. In January, WoW heads to its first school assignment in the Tice community for one week.

The summer kept us busy staffing the project with bilingual interns, a new Urban Education Leader, other educators, and volunteer drivers. Kudos to project leaders — Toni Westland, Supervisory Refuge Ranger; and Sierra Hoisington, DDWS Development Officer — for overseeing the unit's fabrication, design, and cool hands-on exhibits. Watch for details about other public appearances at dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/wow.



The city of Sanibel Council recognized the Refuge's 75th Anniversary with the reading of a proclamation on November 3.



One hands-on WoW exhibit invites visitors to reach into a Gopher Tortoise burrow.

DID YOU KNOW?

The hospitable Gopher Tortoise is known as a keystone species because it shares its burrow with more than 350 species.



ABC7 filmed "Ding" Darling Day happenings with Artist-in-Residence Rachel Pierce and Ranger Toni Westland.



DDWS partnered with the Sanibel Public Library on exhibits about Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling.

2021 Lecture Series

The upcoming season's Friday Lecture Series will evolve with the times and persisting distance protocols by moving to the larger venue of the Sanibel Community House at 2173 Periwinkle Way. The free lectures will occur on five select days throughout the season with one 10 a.m. lecture per day.

The 17th annual "Ding" Darling Friday Lecture Series, which runs January 29 through March 19, 2021, features photographers Clyde and Niki Butcher, *Feather Thief* author Kirk W. Johnson, and eminent authorities on water conservation, eagles, and owls.



"The uncertainties of COVID-19 challenged us to experiment with a new lecture series format so we could accommodate high-quality lecturers but still abide by new distancing guidelines," said Ann-Marie Wildman, "Ding" Darling's Nature Store Manager and lecture series organizer. "We would be extremely limited on how many we could seat at our usual venue in the Visitor & Education Center auditorium, but the Community House gives us more latitude. So, we've decided on fewer lectures with topnotch speakers."

The season's complete schedule is listed below. Book signings follow all starred (*) lectures; books will be available for purchase that day.

Seating for the free lectures is limited and available on a first-come basis. About 150 seats will be available. Face masks will be required. DDWS will be filming most lectures and broadcasting them on Facebook Live at facebook.com/dingdarling.

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

Friday, Jan. 29 - Ocean Doctor David E. Guggenheim, "Lessons from the Deep: What the Oceans Are Telling Us and Why it Matters," sponsored by HighTower/Thomas & Swartz Wealth Management

***Thursday, Feb. 4** - Photographers Clyde and Niki Butcher, *The Everglades*, sponsored by Wayne and Linda Boyd

***Friday, Feb. 19** - Author Jack Davis, "The Bald Eagle: Symbol and Species in American History," sponsored by Southwest Florida Eagle Cam

***Friday, March 12** - Author Paul Bannick, "Great Gray Owl: A Visual Natural History," sponsored by Bill & Laura Harkey

***Friday, March 19** - Author Kirk W. Johnson, *Feather Thief: Beauty, Obsession, and the Natural History Heist of the Century*, sponsored by Ashton Kirchner Group/Keller Williams Realty Sanibel & Captiva, HighTower/Thomas & Swartz Wealth Management, Geoffrey & Karen Moss, and Sanibel Carts

**starred lecture indicates book signing to follow*



2021 "DING" DARLING REFUGE Wish List

Membership donations and annual gifts are essential for the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society to continue its support of conservation and education efforts at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Below are just a **few** unique giving opportunities to enhance the impact of support at the Refuge. To see the scope of the Society's impact and for more ideas and opportunities for giving, please contact Birgie Miller at 239.472.1100 ext. 232 or visit dingdarlingsociety.org.

All gifts are tax deductible.



Honor or Memorial Gift: Any Amount

A gift in honor or memory of a loved one to the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society is a wonderful way to pay tribute to those special in your life. Send a general gift or designate it to a specific area. Gifts of all levels are appreciated and the honoree will be notified (without the amount) of your thoughtfulness. For a gift of \$10,000 or more, a permanently endowed fund can be established.



Video Editing Computer: \$3,000 for Macbook Pro

From virtual summer camp lessons to interactive virtual hikes down Indigo Trail to creative event videos, video editing has become increasingly more relevant to our team. With in-person field trips and events taking a back seat to virtual programs this year, our team needs an editing computer to help produce fun, creative, and educational videos for school children and supporters.



Everyday Education Supplies: \$50 per class or \$12,500 per year

From owl pellets to nature journals to pencils, countless classroom supplies are in demand by our educators to support the thousands of children who have the chance to learn from the "Ding" Darling Urban Education Leader, in-person or virtually. As the federal education budget continues to decrease, we hope that you will choose to support our educators, who tirelessly teach and inspire our next generation of conservation stewards.



Support an Intern Stipend: \$240 per week or \$12,500 per year

Throughout the year, we have several interns from across the country come to the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge to gain experience and help fill in gaps with staffing cutbacks in the fields of education, biology, non-profit management, and visitor services. These interns, usually recent college graduates, provide invaluable support to the Refuge while gaining hands-on, practical experience as they enter their career field. Help support their living and travel stipends.



Educational Taxidermy: \$350 per smaller specimen or \$600 per larger specimen

Experiential learning through physical, realistic examples of wildlife can positively impact the way students and people of all ages see the wildlife and natural world around them. Inspire future biologists, veterinarians, and conservation stewards by funding the taxidermy of an Osprey, Green Heron, Tricolored Heron, Screech Owl, Mangrove Cuckoo, and Diamondback Terrapin, which are species we currently have to preserve.



WoW Gas Cards: \$50 per card

As our new Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) Mobile Classroom rolls out in the coming months, we hope to educate, inspire, and positively impact many schools and communities that are often not within a possible or practical driving distance for a daylong trip to the Refuge. Purchase gas gift cards to Speedway, Mobile, Shell, or Wawa to assist with the travel costs. You can send directly to DDWS or via Amazon.



Summer Field Trips for Under-Represented Minority Communities: \$1,500 per trip, \$15,000 for 10

We are hoping, through our WoW outreach, to establish strong, working relationships with leaders in under-represented communities, while building the trust necessary to have families and groups such as PACE Center for Girls, Harlem Heights, and Quality Life Center want to participate in these Summer Field Trips to the Refuge. DDWS would contract with a bus company to bring interested participants to "Ding." The education team, along with a summer bilingual intern, would give these kids, teenagers, and families an experience to remember. We hope to fund up to 10 summer field trips dependent on covid and interest. We anticipate the expenses for this program will be the rent for transportation, lunch and snacks, giveaways, and swag for the participants.

This year, we hope that you choose to support the many conservation and education efforts at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Best wishes in the new year from our "Ding" family to yours.



For more information about making a gift to support an item on the Refuge's 2021 Wish List, please contact Birgie Miller at 239.472.1100 ext. 232 or visit dingdarlingsociety.org.



MONTHLY GIVING

HELP SUPPORT THE REFUGE
WITH A MONTHLY
DONATION

Impactful

Simple & convenient

Flexible

Eco-friendly



DINGDARLINGSOCIETY.ORG



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](http://dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/include-ding-in-your-will)

'Ding' Day Photo Contest Winners

Rett Hill's "Standing" took second place.



Martha Huard won third place with "Pretty in Pink."

DDWS announced the winners of its 28th annual "Ding" Darling Day Amateur Nature Photography Contest with a special exhibition at the Refuge Visitor & Education Center, part of the "Ding" Day celebration on December 1.

Earlier, on November 19, judges had selected three winners and 12 honorable mentions out of 128 entries from 19 states and Switzerland. All photograph entries were shot at the Refuge complex.

First place went to Ellen Trevor of Sanibel for her Great Egret portrait titled "Carry Out Lunch." Contest judge and photographer Sara Lopez remarked: "I really love the beautiful reflection in this photograph. It has decent lighting, but my favorite part is the splash connecting the fish to the water that the great egret has captured."

In second place was Rett Hill from Henrico, Virginia, with a Little Blue Heron shot titled "Standing." "I like that this photo has a plain background that allows you to focus on the bird that is placed very nicely within the frame," said Calli Johnson, wine steward at Bailey's

General Store, who also judged the contest.

Martha Huard from Bokeelia, Florida, took third place with a photo of a Roseate Spoonbill, titled "Pretty in Pink." "I really enjoyed the crispness of this photograph along with the juxtaposition of the color of the bird versus the color of the sky," said judge Bob Gerwig, Wildlife Refuge Specialist. "It's a really nice action shot, but also has hidden interest with the shadows on the wing of the bird."

"We always choose three judges for the contest," said Terry Baldwin, a DDWS Emeritus Board Member who coordinates the contest along with DDWS Development Officer Sierra Hoisington. "They include a Refuge staff member, a professional photographer, and a member of the Sanibel community."

The three winners received cash awards from DDWS — \$300 for first place, \$225 for second, and \$175 for third. Each honorable mention winner, listed to the right, received a \$25 award, which reflects a refund of the contest entry fee.

The winning photographs and honorable mention award entries will be on display in the Refuge Visitor & Education Center throughout the year.

To view the other top-ranking entries, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests. That page also contains information for entering the Refuge's photo contest in 2021. The deadline for submissions will be September 15, 2021.

HONORABLE MENTIONS (in alphabetical order)

Teresa Anzalone, Sanibel Island, Fla. — "Showing off Her Pearly Whites"
Mike Bauman, Milford, Mich. — "Heavy Sky over Sanibel Bayou"
Corky Boyd, Sanibel Island, Fla. — "Mating Dance"
Dale Dombrowski, Sun City Center, Fla. — "Breakfast"
William Fischer, Sanibel Island, Fla. — "Flying Mangrove Cuckoo"
Kent Jager, Sanibel Island, Fla. — "Teal Twosome"
Scott Jaffe, Highland Beach, Fla. — "The Store"
Len Littenberg, Hinesburg, Vt. — "Bad Hair Day"
Linda Normoyle, Fort Myers, Fla. — "Almost Camouflaged"
Susan Sherman, Doylestown, Pa. — "Sunset Silhouette"
Marletta Short, Fort Myers, Fla. — "I See You!"
Allen Sparks, Cordova, Tenn. — "Yellow-crowned Night Heron"

Annual Meeting: Awards, Elections

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society held its annual meeting on Wednesday, December 2, via Zoom. Among the reports and other business items on the agenda, the Board of Directors voted past president Doris Hardy to the Emeritus Board of Directors and also awarded her its Olympian Award.

Individuals who innovate and champion current and/or past initiatives that result in significant and readily recognizable advancements in fulfilling the Society's mission may be nominated by members of the Society Board, staff or the Refuge Manager for the Society's Olympian Award. Doris is the second recipient of this award, which was started last December with an award to past president John McCabe.



New Emeritus Board Member Doris Hardy

Following the annual meeting, the Board of Directors met to elect its officers for 2021. They are as

follows: President Sarah Ashton, Vice President David Jeffrey, Secretary Wendy Kindig, and Treasurer Bill Valerian.



President Sarah Ashton



VP David Jeffrey



Secretary Wendy Kindig



Treasurer Bill Valerian

TARPON BAY EXPLORERS SCHEDULE

(tarponbayexplorers.com; call ahead to 239-472-8900 to confirm schedule and make reservations)

Tram Tours of Wildlife Drive: Jan 1- Feb 14 Sat- Thurs 9am, 11:30am, 2pm; Feb 15-March 31 Mon-Thurs 9am, 10am, 11:30am, 12:30pm, 2pm; Sat-Sun 9am, 11:30am, 2pm

Kayak Trail Tour: Jan 1- Feb 14 Daily 8:30am or 10am plus Mon-Fri 1pm; Feb 15-March 31 Mon-Thurs 8:30am, 10am, 11:30am, 1pm; Sat-Sun 10am, 1pm

Sunset Rookery Paddle: Jan 1- Feb 14 Mon, Wed, Fri and Sat or Sun.; Feb 15-March 31 Daily 2 hours prior to sunset

Standup Paddleboard Tour: Tues, Thurs, Sat. 9am
Nature and Sea Life Cruise: Daily 11am and 1:30pm

Evening Cruise: Daily 2 hours prior to sunset.

Rentals and fishing charters: Jan 1- Feb 14 Daily 8am-5pm; Feb 15- March 31 Daily 8am-6pm

MEMORIAL AND HONOR GIFTS

September 1 – November 30, 2020

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:

Adaline H. Allen	Dorothy Lamalie
Mark Banks	Robin Lynn Lanum
Andrew Barton	Kenneth L. Lloyd
Larry Holbrook	Karen S. Lord
Rosalie Courter	Claudine Luppi
Bill Currie	Walter Naedele
William F. Currie	Jeanne & Bill Neideck
Randy Deming	Diane and Jenny Norfray
Suzanne Dubuc	Aunt Janet Oberle
William Dunford	Bill Rankin
Richard Durst	Susie & Tom Rathbone
Milton Figg	Barb Rickard
Jacob Fucignas	Mike and Betty Riley
Ruth and Charlie Gerecke	Donald Roessler
Stuart Grinnell	Bud & Martha Ryckman
Kimberley Harwood	Susan Raber Satterfield
Hartley & Maria Howard	Dr. & Mrs. Jerome T. Scholl
Irving & Alwyn Johnson	Amy Simkowitz-Rogers
Samsabrina J. Kaplan	Brenda Smith
Kathryn Kjellsen-Schneider	Whitman Smith
Bob & Marcia Kline	Willow
Irene Kutas	

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

Catherine Boucher & Doug Albert	Lucinda Buhse Kinsley
Clarissa Atkinson	Robin Kirk
Michelle Barry	Liz Kozik
Peter Baran	Rex & Becky Kuhn
Iver Brook	Iliana Liraff
Jeff Combs	Peter Meekin
Ann Deming	Birgie Miller
Peter and Sally Ettlinger	Paul Tritaik
Ruth Bader Ginsburg	Alice Wood
	Ellen Wry

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOW US!

To “like” us on **Facebook** (along with more than 15,000 others), search for “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society. (You can also “like” the Refuge by searching for its “Official” page.) You can follow us on **Instagram**, where we have 13,500-plus followers, at @dingdarlingwildlifesociety. On **Twitter**, search @DingDarlingWS. Also visit our **YouTube** channel by searching “ding darling wildlife society.”



ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Saying Good-bye to 2020

by Sarah Ashton and Jim Metzler,
DDWS Advocacy Committee Co-Chairs

As we say goodbye to 2020, it's important to reflect on the water-related challenges that impact the “Ding” Darling Refuge.

SLOW, STEADY PROGRESS

There are several major projects underway that will significantly impact those challenges. This includes the construction of the C-43 and the EAA reservoirs, and the creation of Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) for each reservoir.

In 2020 progress was made on each of these proj-

ects. However, each of these projects are years away from completion.


ONGOING DIRECTION

One challenge we face in 2021 is that due to the impact of the pandemic, government budgets will be under pressure and, so, funding of water related projects may be reduced.

During the last four years, the federal government has rolled back numerous environmental rules and regulations. We can hope that 2021 will see an end to those rollbacks.

The phrase “rights of nature” refers to the recognition that natural ecosystems have rights. Florida’s Orange County recently became the largest municipality in the United States to adopt a rights of nature law. We will watch how this unfolds.

SUMMARY

We will continue to work with you on water-related issues to ensure that 2021 is, indeed, a happy new year. 

STAFF NEWS

Ranger Jeff Retires

After nearly 24 years of service at “Ding” Darling, Ranger Jeff Combs recently retired from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, effective October 30.

“I will really miss working with you and feel like I am leaving family,” Jeff, who worked several of his

years at the Refuge as volunteer coordinator with visitor services, wrote in an announcement email. “Thank you for all of the good times at the Refuge and for being such good friends.”

“For over two decades, Jeff has served the visiting public by providing an informative, educational, and enjoyable experience to so many,” said Acting Refuge Manager Kevin Godsea. “Either directly or indirectly, the number of people who benefited from his service is immeasurable. We will miss him.”

Jeff started working at “Ding” Darling in December 1996 as an interpreter. He transferred to the Assateague Island National Seashore to work for one summer in 1997, but returned that fall permanently. During his years at the Refuge, Jeff filled roles as fee collector, educator, and overseer of permits, contracting, and concessions. He also assisted the maintenance and biology departments.

He will be most remembered for his position as volunteer coordinator, however. Training, scheduling, and working with more than 300 volunteers brought the respect of everyone associated with the Refuge. He



Jeff Combs

was protective of his worker bees, and each year was in charge of planning a volunteer holiday party and end-of-season awards luncheon. We wish him the best of luck in his well-deserved retirement years.

Urban Education Leader

Melissa Maher recently took the position of Urban Education Leader for the Refuge. The position, funded through philanthropic support by DDWS, was created to oversee the Refuge’s education outreach, including the Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) mobile classroom, which debuted in December to visit schools and venues in underserved areas throughout a five-county region.

Melissa comes to the Refuge from Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, with more than 20 years of experience in development and oversight of student-focused strategies and programs. Within the past 15 years, she has held positions as teacher, school program manager, and district career coordinator.

At “Ding” Darling, Melissa will lead a team of bilingual Spanish interpreters, interns, and volunteers to schedule visits with the mobile classroom and facilitate curriculum to benefit teachers and meet Florida education standards.

“I am honored and excited to be able to launch the WoW project,” said Melissa, a native of Joliet, Illinois. “I will be able to share my passion for nature conservation and wildlife protection with students and community members while they gain a deeper meaning and appreciation for it.”



Melissa Maher

WILDLIFE SPOTLIGHT

"The White Pelicans have arrived!" It's always a happy day the first time visitors, staff, and volunteers spot their fall arrival along Wildlife Drive. Thanks to Ed Saturnus for sharing the capture of a Refuge flock.



DID YOU KNOW?

Lacking bare skin on their bellies, pelicans incubate their eggs by standing on them.

Interns, Volunteers Join Education Team

This summer, DDWS added two bilingual Spanish interpreters and the Refuge added two education resident volunteers to the Education Team to support the Refuge's outreach mission, including its new WoW urban mobile classroom.

Alfredo Carbajal graduated from the University of Texas in San Antonio in December 2019 with a major in environmental science and a concentration in wildlife management. He has a special interest in herbaceous and woody plants and also spent three years at the university assisting with monarch butterfly research.



Alfredo Carbajal

Alfredo recently finished an internship with the Chicago Field Museum, where he helped mainly with its Monarch Community Science project as a bilingual interpreter. Spanish is the intern's first language, having learned it from his family, who immigrated from Mexico, and during summers spent working on his grandfather's ranch there.

Born in Sabana Grande, Puerto Rico, Taína A. Milán graduated from Interamerican University, San Germán Campus, in May 2020 with a major in biology. Prior to traveling to "Ding" Darling, she worked as a summer Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) supervisor at the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge in Puerto Rico.

Taína's internship was made possible by the 2021 Suzanne M. Dubuc Education Intern Fund, established in the name of a life-long educator remembered for her creativity in the class-



Taína A. Milán

room and later in a retail operation selling educational supplies for teachers.

Ross Feilhauer and Kaela Hamilton are part of a resident volunteer program that sets up participants with recreational vehicle parking and hook-ups at the Refuge in exchange for their on-the-job hours. They both worked on Broadway prior to the pandemic shutdown – Ross most recently on special effects, pyrotechnics, and lighting for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*; Kaela on video for Alanis Morissette's Broadway musical *Jagged Little Pill*, and building props for Cirque Du Soleil's *Drawn to Life* creation in Orlando.



Kaela Hamilton and Ross Feilhauer

Welcome to New DDWS Intern

Intern Hollis Hatfield recently arrived from North Carolina to assist the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society through season. She received her undergraduate degree in wildlife conservation from Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, with a minor in leadership and social change. She subsequently studied wildlife conservation and management at University College Dublin in Ireland.

"I spent this summer collecting shorebird nesting data for my master's thesis at Hammocks Beach State Park, which is a small, uninhabited island off the coast of North Carolina," said Hollis. The Raleigh, North Carolina, native will be assisting DDWS in its fundraising efforts to support education, research, and conservation at the Refuge.



Hollis Hatfield

"I love Sanibel because I have seen so much wildlife since arriving-- snakes, gopher tortoises, alligators, rabbits, and several unique bird species," said Hollis.

New Visitor Services Intern

Jessica Barry recently joined the Refuge team as a Visitor Services Intern working fulltime with Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. A Fort Myers native, Jessica has been visiting the Refuge since an early age.

"I remember visiting the Visitor & Education Center and Wildlife Drive as a child and falling in love with Sanibel's natural beauty every time," she said.



Jessica graduated from Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee in December 2018 with a major in psychology and a minor in children's developmental disabilities. She worked for four years as a teacher at FSU's Childcare Center and more recently as an academic and physical coach for children with disabilities, primarily those on the autism spectrum, at Brain Balance Achievement Center in Naples.

DDWS provides living stipends and other benefits for about a dozen interns each year. The Refuge supports interns with free housing.

"We welcome our new interns' energy and enthusiasm," said Toni Westland. "We thank our Friends group for making their internships possible. With our shrinking staff, due to federal budget cuts, this sort of partnership is crucial to keep the Refuge running."

For more information about the Refuge's internship programs, contact Toni at 239-472-1100 ext. 237. To learn about supporting the Refuge intern program, contact Birgie Miller, DDWS Executive Director, at 239-472-1100 ext. 4.





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PHOTO CONTEST 2020



The winners of the 2020 "Ding" Darling Day Amateur Nature Photography Contest went on display at the Visitor & Education Center on December 1 and will be exhibited inside the Center for the coming months. Ellen Trevor of Sanibel Island won first place this year with this Great Egret portrait "Carry Out Lunch." See page 5 for more information or visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests to view all 15 winning photos.

DID YOU KNOW?

During the late 1800s, the Great Egret was hunted nearly to extinction for its feather. Once worth twice their weight in gold, they were coveted for hat-making at the time.