

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Hands-on animal encounters makes “Ding” Days fun and educational for kids. [images available upon request]

‘Ding’ Days wants to reconnect kids with nature

The Let’s Go Outside! theme for the 20th annual “Ding” Darling Days, Oct. 18-24, 2009, on Sanibel Island expresses J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge’s mission to reconnect children with the great outdoors in an effort to combat nature-deficiency disorder.

To that end, the refuge and “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), have designed a number of programs and activities with school groups and others that are open to the public. This year, for the first time, “Ding” Days introduces Conservation Through Art Day, geared largely toward children and nature artists.

Sunday Family Fun Day, a free-to-the-public event at the refuge, kicks off the weeklong eco-festival on Oct. 18. Kid activities include:

- Free Explorer Packs to the first 100 kids
- Family Nature Yoga
- Native Wildlife Encounters by the Everglades Wildlife Sanctuary at Flamingo Gardens, sponsored by Sanibel Captiva Trust Company
- Fabulous Florida Reptile Show by the Calusa Herpetological Society, sponsored by John Grey Painting
- Kids Conservation Cartoon Contest Presentation
- Exotic Reptiles: Keep Them Out of the Wild by the Calusa Herpetological
- Mote Marine Laboratory Exhibit and Touch Tank
- Butterfly House, sponsored by Sanibel-Captiva Community Bank
- Face painting, sponsored by Lily & Co.
- Snake craft project, sponsored by Bailey’s General Store
- Butterfly craft project, sponsored by The Clem Werner Family
- Wildlife/Bird craft project, sponsored by Sanibel-Captiva Kiwanis Club
- Stuffed Manatee Doll craft project
- Free hot dogs and beverages, sponsored by Jerry’s Foods
- Free refuge tram tours, sponsored by Tarpon Bay Explorers

Week-long, the refuge and Tarpon Bay Explorers (TBE), the refuge’s concessions operator, are offering free and discounted nature tours at the refuge. Bank of the Islands/Edison Bank will sponsor a children’s nature photography contest involving two local school classes.

Winners of that contest will be announced as part of Conservation Through Art Day at the refuge on Saturday, Oct. 24. Other free family-oriented activities that day include:

- Wildlife Cartoonist Dave Horton drawing caricatures

- How To Create a Nature Book with celebrity children's author Marianne Berkes
- Nature Sketching on Indigo Trail
- Wildlife Art Workshop
- Federal & Federal Junior Duck Stamp Artists' presentations and signings
- Florida Junior Duck Stamp Award Ceremony
- Naturalist-narrated refuge tram tours, sponsored by Tarpon Bay Explorers

“Ding” Darling Days celebrates the birthday of Jay “Ding” Darling, the refuge’s namesake and father of the Duck Stamp Program. The event is co-presented by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, DDWS, and Tarpon Bay Explorers. For the full schedule of events and activities and list of sponsors, visit www.dingdarlingdays.com.

To join “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society and become a friend to the refuge, stop in at the Refuge Education Center or visit www.dingdarlingsociety.org.

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