

Protect. Educate.
Inspire.

2023 "DING" DARLING WILDLIFE SOCIETY SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge is committed to educating our youth as conservation stewards of the future. To that end, the Society works with various businesses and individuals to provide annual scholarships to local students engaged in the study of conservation, biology, and the environment.

The 2023 recipients are graduating high school seniors and college and post-graduate students from the five surrounding counties. These students have plans to pursue a career in science with a focus on environmental or natural resources, environmental education, wildlife conservation, environmental law or public policy, and conservation nonprofit.

On the following pages are the annual scholarships awarded this year with background on the scholarship and the student recipient. We thank the individuals and families who have made these scholarships possible.



Dara Craig, one of this year's thirteen scholarship recipients.

THE UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES THAT WILL BE GAINING THESE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS:



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA



Stanford
University



FLORIDA
SOUTHWESTERN
STATE COLLEGE



UNIVERSITY OF
OREGON



FLORIDA
GULF COAST
UNIVERSITY

Duke
UNIVERSITY





ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS

Endowed Scholarships can be established with a minimum gift of \$25,000.

General endowments can be established with \$10,000.

JANE WERNER ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

A Refuge volunteer for 25 years and a true believer in protecting our wildlife and its habitat, Jane Werner furthered her family's interest in education with this annual scholarship to encourage environmental studies. Before their passing, Jane and her husband Clem funded five scholarships in their hometown of Davenport, Iowa, since the mid 1990s, and at their alma maters -- Smith and Northwestern respectively. She chose to establish the first permanently endowed scholarship through the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society with the hope of making a direct impact on students in Southwest Florida and further their interest in becoming our next environmental stewards. Jane passed away in 2012, and her family continues to support the Refuge and this scholarship fund.



To learn more about this endowed scholarship fund, [click here.](#)

STUDENT RECIPIENT:

DARA CRAIG

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Dara Craig graduated from Cypress Lake High School in Ft. Myers, Florida, and Vanderbilt University. She is now pursuing her Ph.D. in Environmental Science, Studies, and Policy at the University of Oregon. Dara has extensive experiences in the US and overseas (Vanderbilt, Mote Marine Lab, Honduras, New Zealand, British Virgin Islands, Indonesia) in research and teaching, which have influenced her educational path. Her thesis covers researching fisheries co-governance, joint marine spatial planning, and partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. In addition, she is finding time to mentor 19 upper-level undergraduates on ecological monitoring techniques and work for the Pacific Northwest Tribal Climate Change Project. Dara's long-term goal is to develop science-based marine conservation programs that respect both nature and culture. As she put it, "I am learning how to ensure that my research is reciprocal, solutions-oriented, and valuable to the communities with whom I work."

STUDENT RECIPIENT:

MALLORY POFF

DUKE UNIVERSITY

Mallory Poff graduated in the class of 2019 from Barron Collier High School in Naples, Florida, and graduated in May from Elon University with a Bachelor of Science in Engineering. She has been accepted into the Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering and Materials Science (MEMS) department of Duke University for the fall. This will prepare her for a career focused on renewable energy. She was one of two female honors engineers in her class at Elon. Mallory conducted a 2-year honors research thesis project focused on developing an efficient solar panel design to power a mobile cooling unit that meets agricultural standards for small farms. She also worked on another project to determine the best material for a constructed floating wetland.



DR. H. RANDALL DEMING ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FOR CONSERVATION & ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

This permanently endowed annual scholarship was established in memory of Dr. H. Randall Deming by his family. Randy graduated from Dartmouth College and the University of Vermont School of Medicine. He practiced Radiology at the Maine Medical Center for 30 years, which included serving as the chair of the department. After retiring in 1995, Randy and his wife Ann divided their time between Maine and Fort Myers. A lifelong outdoors enthusiast and avid birder, Randy loved spending time at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge and would initiate frequent outings to the Refuge with his children and grandchildren. Affectionately known as "Big Daddy," Randy was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, and friend. He is remembered for his crushing hugs, gentle demeanor, big heart, and great love for his family. Because he truly appreciated and valued the importance of education and the protection of our natural habitat, this scholarship has been established to provide an opportunity for students interested in the conservation and preservation of our natural environment to pursue their studies.



To learn more about this endowed scholarship fund, [click here.](#)

STUDENT RECIPIENT: **ELLA GUEDOUAR** *FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY*

Ella Guedouar graduated from Estero High School in Estero, Florida, and is now finishing her master's degree at Florida Gulf Coast University. While an undergraduate at FGCU, her first research subject was an isolated monkey at the Octagon Wildlife Sanctuary in Punta Gorda, FL. She published a paper on the impact captivity had on animal behavior in the inaugural issue of the Florida Undergraduate Research Journal. Her next project was a collaboration to understand the spatial ecology of the eastern diamondback rattlesnakes in a peri-urban landscape. They spent hundreds of hours radio-tracking and relocating dozens of rattlesnakes that made their way into residential areas and educating those who called for the removal. During her master's degree, she organized and ran her first international research trip to the Peruvian Amazon. Ella led a team of four researchers that examined the role of passive human interactions on the fish and mammal community at two field stations. She has been accepted into the University of South Florida's integrative biology Ph.D. program, working under Dr. Margres for the fall semester.



WIN & MARYLN KLOOSTERMAN ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

Marilyn and Winton Kloosterman were lifelong educators – Marilyn, a high school teacher, and Win, a university professor. In 1986, they sold their home in Michigan and moved to Sanibel to enjoy a lifestyle where they could be outside all year around. With a passion for the natural world, they both began volunteering at “Ding,” a pursuit that continued for over 20 years for Win and more than 30 for Marilyn. Both were active in the Ding Darling Wildlife Society, with Marilyn serving as president of the Board of Directors from 1995 to 1997 and later as an emeritus member of the Board. Marilyn was also heavily involved with the Scholarship Committee.



Marilyn and Win loved to travel and toured much of the world on their own and with the Lee County Friendship Force. Every time they returned to Sanibel, they were eager to see their human and avian friends at Ding. Knowing that education is key to assuring the love of nature they instilled in their children and grandchildren, Marilyn and Win were pleased to establish this scholarship to support students interested in preserving the environment.

To learn more about this endowed scholarship fund, [click here.](#)

RECIPIENT: BLADE KALIKOW *NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY*

Blade Kalikow graduated from Community High School of Naples, Florida, and has completed his second year at Northeastern University studying Environmental Engineering. Blade has always enjoyed being outdoors in nature and found that science has given him the tools to understand the world surrounding us. During his first year, he helped design an innovative automatic watering device, which measures the water content of soil and water plants accordingly to minimize agricultural water waste. The American Society of Engineering Education published the findings of this project. Blade is also involved with Engineers Without Borders, Northeastern’s Wildlife & Ecology Club, and works as a research assistant studying coffee waste and potential ways to reuse it. During his sophomore year, he did research in Phytoremediation of PFAS (“forever chemicals.”) His team presented their research project at the New England Water Environment Association 2023 conference, and they continue to investigate the feasibility of their solution. Blade is now interning with the Parsons Corporation, working at a Superfund site. This Superfund site is a top 10 priority site for the EPA. By pursuing a degree in environmental engineering, he hopes to improve the environment that all life forms depend upon.





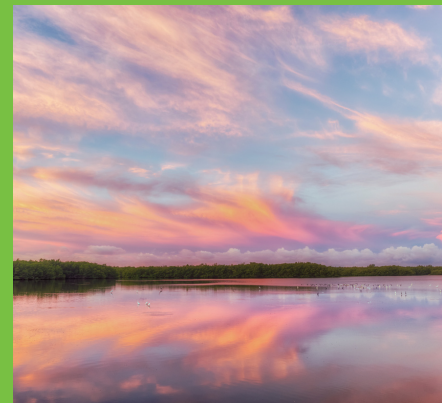
ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Annual Scholarships can be established with a minimum gift of \$1,000.

RICHARD L. BAILEY ENVIRONMENTAL SCHOLARSHIP

Before retiring and moving part-time to Fort Myers, Richard Bailey's career was with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a federal agency focused on the condition of the oceans and the atmosphere. Once he retired, he found his place as a volunteer at the "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, which he always loved to visit, finding true peace and tranquility surrounded by the beauty of wildlife and nature.

Richard passed away several years ago, and his son, Robert Bailey, established this scholarship in loving memory of his father. Many of the long-time volunteers at the Refuge remember Richard as a loyal and committed volunteer of the Refuge who would do anything to help. His son knew how much the Refuge and his time as a volunteer meant to him and wanted to do something to honor his memory and commitment to conservation. His son hopes that the Richard L. Bailey Environmental Scholarship recipient will be as committed to conservation and devoted to making a difference in our world.



STUDENT RECIPIENT: **S. CARTER OLECKNA** *FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY*

S. Carter Oleckna graduated from Imagine High School in North Port, Florida. He is a biology major with minors in chemistry and climate change at Florida Gulf Coast University. A doctoral degree to study ocean conservation and coastal plant restoration methods is his long-term goal. At FGCU, he is an undergraduate research assistant for Dr. Serge Thomas. They are conducting post-Hurricane Ian pond research on Sanibel Island. His research involves monitoring the ponds' water quality, including turbidity, chlorophyll, pH, and more. The purpose of this research is to find out how long it takes multiple freshwater ecosystems to bounce back after the effects of Hurricane Ian. He is also assisting Dr. James Douglass in a phytoremediation community outreach project. This research project aims to implement ecologically conscious pond management in wet detention ponds in SW Florida.



MIKE & TERRY BALDWIN SCHOLARSHIP

Mike and Terry Baldwin have made Sanibel Island and Fort Myers their year-round home for the last 24 years. They are avid supporters of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge and its friend's group, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS). At a time when so many young people seem to be spending less and less time in the great outdoors, they are delighted to sponsor a DDWS Scholarship for students who are interested in studies that can help protect and foster our ecology and environment.



Terry holds an EdD from the University of Cincinnati and, since moving to Sanibel, has become an avid wildlife photographer. She served on the board of the DDWS for nine years, seven years as its secretary, and now acts as a member of its emeritus board. She also chairs the annual DDWS photography contest and teaches a wildlife photography program at the Refuge during "season." Mike holds a Ph.D. in organic chemistry, retired as Vice-President of Technology for Millennium Chemical in 1999, acted as a safety and environmental consultant to senior management in the energy and chemical sectors until late 2013, served as President of the DDWS, and is now an emeritus member of the board.

STUDENT RECIPIENT: CHASE QUROLLO *STANFORD UNIVERSITY*

Chase Qurollo graduated from Cape Coral High School in Cape Coral, Florida, and will start studying Environmental Engineering at the University of Central Florida this fall. His career path is set on "conserving the environment and finding solutions to recurring and detrimental environmental impacts." As a project for his studies within the International Baccalaureate, he investigated, designed, and created floating mats that would hold plants, known as "bioremediation mats," which were used at the pond in front of his school. This project was a victim of Hurricane Ian. While becoming a distinguished AP scholar, he also worked for two years at Bella Verde Farms, his school's community garden on campus. He mentored those who were new and trying to learn the principles of subsistence gardening, permaculture, and building sustainable landscapes. He is an avid outdoorsman who spends many hours fishing, boating, and exploring Pine Island Sound. His photography shows his love of Florida wildlife and nature. He was this year's winner of the 10th annual "Ding" Darling-Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest (pictured below).



Nature's Bandit by Chase Qurollo



DR. ANDREW & LAURA DAHLEM SCHOLARSHIP

The Dr. Andrew and Laura Dahlem Scholarship was established in honor of its namesake's passion and service to family, wildlife, community, and science. For many years, Andrew and Laura have enjoyed the wildlife of Sanibel Island and the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. The commitment to ecological preservation that embodies the Refuge and the island as a whole played an integral role in their decision to call the island home in 2011, and "Ding" Darling is now only a short bike ride away. The Dahlems continue supporting wildlife preservation efforts so that future generations may similarly benefit from the beauty they now enjoy.



Originally from Dayton, Ohio, both Andrew and Laura graduated from Ohio State University and pursued careers in scientific fields. Andrew earned his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois in Toxicology, studying the effects of cyanobacteria on the environment. Laura earned a master's degree in speech therapy from Ohio State University and continues to be passionate about scientific research in her field. Andrew and Laura are now long-time residents of Indianapolis, Indiana. Andrew is an avid animal lover, particularly turtles, and has transformed his suburban yard into a mini wildlife refuge. Laura continues to be a prolific volunteer in all aspects of her community. Andrew and Laura provide love and support for their three children as they pursue their own dreams.

STUDENT RECIPIENT: MARLIN SMITH *FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY*

Marlin Smith graduated from North Ft. Myers High School and Florida Gulf Coast University with a marine science and environmental studies degree. He is in his first year of the Environmental Science Master's program at FGCU. Due to the destruction of the field station caused by Hurricane Ian, he has rebuilt and relocated his sampling equipment to the main campus and has continued his research. With the field station out of commission and the need to sample and analyze water quality, they applied for a research cruise with the Florida Institute of Oceanography for a weeklong cruise starting in Tampa Bay, going down to Marco Island and offshore everywhere between. They collected samples for the EPA, FWC, and the researchers at FGCU to better understand how the hurricane impacted water quality in the SWFL region. They have secured additional funding with the National Science Foundation RAPID grant to complete two follow-up cruises focusing on the region's recovery and stabilization of water quality. This will be a significant component of his graduate research and thesis, and he plans on publishing this research upon graduation. He has completed his NAUI Instructor certification and plans to teach new students in both recreational and scientific diving.



LESLIE & HANS FLEISCHNER SCHOLARSHIP

For many decades, the Fleischner family has made Sanibel their winter home. They fell in love with the conservation ethic of the island and the sense of being surrounded by wildlife on their porch overlooking the gulf, to driving down the road to get to the Refuge and other favorite island spots. Making regular trips to the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge was always a favorite. Leslie is a part-time resident of Sanibel Island and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Leslie graduated from Carnegie Institute of Technology and has always been very involved in the community where she lives, believing strongly in supporting education. The family supports students through the Pittsburgh Chapter of the ARCS Foundation, which provides scholarships to the best emerging scientists at Carnegie Mellon University, The University of Pittsburgh, and Penn State; at the middle-school Neighborhood Academy and at local opera company programs developing stars of the future. Leslie and Hans raised two boys, working to instill the love of nature and the outdoors. She owned and operated a successful needlework shop, then took up photography, including some amazing shots of Sanibel birds, shells, and landscapes. Hans graduated from Harvard (BA) and Columbia (MBA) and spent most of his working life with the United States Steel Corporation. Upon retirement, Hans and Leslie traveled to all seven continents including the North Pole. Hans passed away in 2021, but Leslie keeps his charitable spirit alive by continuing to invest in the younger generation.



STUDENT RECIPIENT:

CHLOE LOWMAN

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Chloe Lowman is a graduate of Cypress Lake High School in Fort Myers. Her love of the marine environment started at a young age, growing up in Sanibel and working at the Sanibel Sea School as a volunteer collecting water samples. In high school, she excelled in academics, taking many AP classes while becoming a founding member of the Panther Pack spirit club, vice president of the Student Government Association, and president of the Vocal Department Council. She would like to work towards becoming an environmental lawyer through UCF's environmental science and law program.

STUDENT RECIPIENT:

ELISE BROWN

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

Elise Brown is a Fort Myers High School graduate planning to double major in environmental engineering and music at the University of Florida. She completed a research experiment at the FGCU lab for her IB Chemistry class. The experiment was about the absorption spectrum of different sunscreens, some being environmentally friendly and others being ecologically detrimental. She graduated in the top 5% of her class while winning multiple awards in piano competitions, working several jobs as a math tutor and self-employed piano teacher, and volunteering at her church camp. She hopes to attend law school and practice environmental law.



MARY ELAINE JACOBSON MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

The Mary Elaine Jacobson Memorial Scholarship was established in her fond memory by the Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society. Elaine, a board member and the program chairperson for San-Cap Audubon from 2003 through 2015, planned and coordinated their very successful yearly lecture series on birds and the environment. She conducted a weekly visitor plant walk as a “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge volunteer for over a decade and a self-taught expert on local Florida flora. She and her husband also led a weekly Refuge visitor bicycle tour. In addition, Elaine volunteered at the Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), where she organized and led their native plant education program, Weeds & Seeds. Elaine passed away in July 2015 and is sorely missed by all who had the privilege of knowing her. She was always enthusiastic about everything that interested her, and her enthusiasm was contagious. A vibrant and lively person who enjoyed life to the fullest while being amazingly giving and loving, Elaine’s curiosity and excitement about plants, nature, history, and her passion for exploring the world were admired by many.



STUDENT RECIPIENT: TORI GUARINO *FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY*

Tori Guarino graduated from Golden Gate High School in Naples, Florida, and now attends Florida Gulf Coast University. She majors in Biology and minors in Environmental Education and Chemistry, with a Bachelor of Science degree expected in Spring 2024. Her research journey began in November 2021 with a community project associated with the university removing invasive plants in Southwest Florida. This work led to her receiving a research grant through the FGCU Whitaker Center for STEM Education to expand the project. Independently with her grant, she researched Southwest Florida plant coverage and diversity at ponds and the proportion of invasive species within the ecosystem. This taught her what communities can do to reduce nutrient pollution from yard fertilizers and pesticides entering our local waterways. Recently, she assisted Dr. Serge Thomas with water quality testing of twelve ponds on Sanibel Island. The sampling is to record the effects of the saline storm surge on the freshwater stormwater ponds.



BARRY & FRANCINE LITOFSKY SCHOLARSHIP

The Barry & Francine Litofsky Scholarship was established in memory of a beautiful, nature-loving couple. Francine was originally from Brooklyn, NY, and her education at Barnard College was in chemistry. But her artistic and environmental drive was always as strong as her scientific nature. She was well known in Sanibel as a nature and landscape black-and-white photographer. Her photographs are in numerous homes on Sanibel and the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge administration building, along with a book of her nature photographs that she published. Her love of nature started with shell collecting on Sanibel. Still, she donated her entire scientifically indexed shell collection to the National Bailey-Mathews Shell Museum to concentrate on birding and photography. Francine loved being an active volunteer at the Refuge and sharing her love of nature with others.



Francine loved taking photos at "Ding" and was an avid wildlife photographer.

Barry grew up in Brooklyn and has degrees in electrical engineering and computer science from New York University, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania, where he got his Ph.D. He lived in New Jersey, where he raised his family, and worked at AT&T Bell Laboratories for 35 years. Barry and Francine loved Sanibel. They had vacationed on the island in a timeshare for decades and eventually decided to retire on the island. They adored the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, where Barry volunteered and worked for Tarpon Bay Explorers.

RECIPIENT: EMELIA VALENTZ UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Emelia Valentz Valentz is a graduate of Port Charlotte High School, Florida. She will attend the University of South Florida in the fall to double major in pre-architecture and computer science. Her long-term goal is to work on sustainable architecture, community development, and restoration. In high school, she was co-president of the Environmental Club, held an internship with Heal Our Harbor as a website developer, and took part in many cleanups, such as the International Coastal Cleanup. She was involved in and held leadership positions in several other clubs, including Model United Nations, Mu Alpha Theta, National Honors Society, and Student Government Assoc.



"DING" DARLING CONSERVATION SCHOLARSHIP

The "Ding" Darling Conservation Scholarship was funded by an anonymous donor who has a passion for environmental education.



RECIPIENT: LILIANA SLAZAR-JUAREZ *FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY*

Liliana Salazar-Juarez graduated from Immokalee High School in Immokalee, Florida, and will represent the first generation in her family to attend college. She will start at Florida State University this fall to fulfill her goal of studying wildlife biology. She maintained her high grade point average while being involved with many school activities, such as being a member of the National BETA club, the Key club, part of the color guard team, and served as president of her college reach-out program and as a tutor with the Immokalee Foundation.



TARPON BAY EXPLORERS SCHOLARSHIP

Tarpon Bay Explorers has been supporting this scholarship program since its inception. The official recreational concession for the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Tarpon Bay Explorers offers kayak rentals and tours, Wildlife Drive tram tours, nature boating cruises, educational Deck Talks, and other opportunities to learn more about local wildlife and its habitat. "Our Tarpon Bay Explorer naturalists are a team of environmental educators. Many of these talented individuals would not have had the opportunity to complete environmental studies or other related programs if it weren't for grants and scholarships from members of the business community," said co-owner Wendy Schnapp. "Therefore, we understand the value of educating these young people and are glad to contribute. We are fortunate to be able to offer these scholarships."



RECIPIENT: MARK LEONE *FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY*

Mark Leone graduated in 2020 from Estero High School, in Estero, Florida and is attending Stanford University, where he is pursuing a BS in Engineering for Extreme Environments. Mark grew up in south Florida fishing and exploring nature but was disappointed when red tide took away his ability to be on the water. This began his passion to study and find solutions to marine water problems. He has worked on projects related to water quality with researchers at Florida Gulf Coast University and Mote Marine Lab. He now works part-time with Dr Barbara Block at Hopkins Marine Station. He has sailed on the SSV Robert C Seamans in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. While onboard the Seamans, he led a project studying the relationships between mesoscale eddies (swirling ocean currents dozens of miles wide) and the biology of the twilight zone (the region between 200 and 1000 meters deep). He is hoping to submit a paper on this research for publication early this summer. Since Hurricane Ian he has also started volunteering remotely for FGCU to help with data analysis, mapmaking, and writing grants to secure funding to better understand how Hurricane Ian impacted the oceanography, and more specifically the harmful algae, of the region. In the next year, he plans to start applying to PhD programs in Applied Ocean Science and Physical Oceanography.

