



# J.N. “Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge FAQ

## General Q & A

### **What is this place? Why is it here?**

You are at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. This refuge was created to preserve and protect migratory bird habitat. Here you will have an excellent opportunity to see wild animals in their natural habitats. This is one of approximately 553 national wildlife refuges managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as wildlife habitat.

### **Who is “Ding” Darling?**

Jay Norwood “Ding” Darling was a well-known conservationist and political cartoonist from 1900 to 1949. He was appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as Chief of the newly formed U.S. Biological Survey, which later became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He also started the Federal Duck Stamp Program. Inside the Refuge Education Center is an exhibit of “Ding” Darling’s studio and more information on him and his impact on conservation.

### **When was the Education Center opened? What are its hours?**

The old visitor center, now the Administration Building, opened on March 12, 1982. This new building, called the “Ding” Darling Education Center, opened in 1999. All the money to build the building was raised through private philanthropic support through the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge.

Admission to the Education Center is **FREE**.

**Hours:** From January to April, the hours are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily. From May to December, the hours are 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily.

### **When is the next Refuge Video?**

The refuge video gives people a good overall sense of the refuge and is shown on the hour and half-hour within the Education Center. The volunteer staff may present the program between these times at their discretion, when enough interest is expressed by the visitors.

## **Wildlife Drive**

### **How long is Wildlife Drive? How long will it take to go through?**

Wildlife Drive is 4 miles long. The speed limit is 15 mph, but most people go even slower. It takes approximately 2 hours if you stop along the way. It is a one-way drive only to where it ends at Sanibel Captiva Road. (**Note:** Wildlife Drive will be closed for resurfacing and upgrades mid-May through September 2013.

Visit <http://www.dingdarlingsociety.org/wd-close> for more information.]

### **What will I see on Wildlife Drive and its trails?**

Primarily, you will see birds that live in the mangrove estuary. The birds you will see are dependent on the season and the tide. In the winter (January and February), you will see the most birds, as well as during the spring and fall migrations. During the summer, you will see year-round resident birds such as herons, egrets, osprey, pelicans, spoonbills, cormorants, and anhingas. No matter what time of the year, it is always best birding at low tide. This is because the water level is low enough for the birds to feed. Look at the Education Center free exhibits to learn the types of birds you will see.

### **When is low tide?**

To obtain the times of day for low tide, call the main number of “Ding” Darling at 239-472-1100 and push number 2.

### **What is the best way to visit Wildlife Drive?**

Visitors may drive, bicycle, walk, or take a tram tour of Wildlife Drive. We recommend a tram tour, as it reduces traffic on the Drive and gives visitors a chance to learn more about the refuge from a naturalist.

### **How much does it cost to go through the refuge?**

Cost to enter Wildlife Drive: It is \$5 per vehicle and \$1 per bicycle or pedestrian. Children 15 and under are free.

Visitors pay the entrance fee at the fee station at the beginning of Wildlife Drive. The Refuge Annual pass, Annual pass, Senior pass, Access Pass, or a current Federal Duck Stamp may all be used as an entrance pass.

Tram seats can be reserved through Tarpon Bay Explorers. Cost is \$13 for adults, \$8 for children. Trams are handicap accessible.

### **What are the hours of Wildlife Drive?**

The front gate opens to walkers, bikers, and vehicles at 7:30 a.m. The Drive front gate closes one half hour before sunset to allow people enough time to drive through at a reasonable pace. Visitors are required to be out of the refuge ½ hour after sunset. **Wildlife Drive is CLOSED on Fridays** to give the wildlife a break from traffic. This has been the case for well over 10 years to coincide with the lightest day of the week for visitations.

## **Activities**

### **Do you have guided tours through the refuge?**

Refuge volunteers and staff lead guided tours during the winter season and all are free. Summer family programs also include a couple of tours. Local private guides for Wildlife Drive and various canoe trails are available year-round. Brochures are available at the Visitor Information Desk.

### **Do you have canoes and bicycles for rent?**

Canoes, kayaks, bikes, and stand-up paddleboards can be rented at the Tarpon Bay Recreation Area on Sanibel from Tarpon Bay Explorers, the refuge’s official recreation concession. They are not available for rent at the Visitor & Education Center. Other commercial outfitters on Sanibel and Captiva islands also rent paddlecraft and bikes.