

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release
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Caption: A Jim Sprankle reddish egret necklace slider and American avocet sculpture are among Go Wild's live auction items.

Logo attached

Go Wild for 'Ding' highlights reddish egret

This year's fundraiser to benefit J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge revolves around the reddish egret, one of the refuge's most well-loved and uncommon birds. It takes place on Tuesday, Feb. 23, from 5:30 to 9 p.m. at the Sanibel Community House. Advance reservations are required.

The Go Wild for "Ding" – Dance of the Reddish Egret fundraiser features a dinner buffet that samples the islands' best restaurants, including lead restaurant sponsor Matzaluna Italian Kitchen, plus Trader's Store & Café, Bailey's General Store, George & Wendy's Seafood Grille, Queenie's Ice Cream, and Sanibel Sweet Shoppe.

Formerly Trailgate Party, Go Wild headlines live auction items fit for the reddish egret theme. Master island sculptor Jim Sprankle has created a reddish egret necklace slide specially for the event. Also on the live auction block: an American avocet carving by Sprankle and a pontoon-dinner excursion for eight to the refuge's Woodring Point including wine, cheese, sunset, meeting Jean and Ralph Woodring, and an island restaurant dinner.

The reddish egret (*Egretta rufescens*), known for its erratic "dancing" when it forages, is the rarest and least studied wading bird in the U.S., according to Dr. Kenneth Meyer, who is now researching the bird at the refuge and will be attending Go Wild. Proceeds will benefit the Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI) study and other refuge wildlife and habitat projects.

Sprankle has also hand-carved and –painted a delicate Reddish Egret Feather Pin for a chance drawing to be held that evening. Chance purchasers need not attend the event and can visit dingdarlingsociety.org/go-wild for more information. The prize includes membership into the exclusive, 50-member Sprankle Feather Club, which flocks together each year for a themed gathering.

Second- and third-place prizes include framed nature art photographs that capture the reddish egret's graceful movements by professional photographers Terry Baldwin and Al Hoffacker.

“Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) hosts the event, which includes live entertainment and silent and live auctions to provide support where government funding falls short for the refuge.

“We are so grateful to our generous restaurants and sponsors for making this third annual fundraiser possible,” said Doris Hardy, DDWS president. “Also a big thanks to all of our friends who have donated wonderful, uniquely refuge auction items.”

More than 40 silent auction items include a framed limited edition Audubon print of a reddish egret valued at more than \$2,000; tri-color, 14-karat gold island charm necklace valued at \$1,300; and wooden, scale-model, 1950s Chris Craft runabout boat and a collectible book on Chris Craft boats, with an estimated value of \$600. Stay tuned for news on more auction items to come.

Attendance to the Feb. 23 event is by reservation only; 70 spots remain.. Tickets to Go Wild for “Ding” – Dance of the Reddish Egret are \$100 each. Due to space limitations, walk-in or any additional guests will not be able to attend. To reserve, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/go-wild or call 239-292-0566.

Champion Level: Mark & Gretchen Banks, John & Kathy McCabe, Jim & Patty Sprankle; **Guardian Level:** Matzaluna Italian Kitchen, South Seas Island Resort; **Protector Level:** Sarah Ashton & Jim Metzler, Peter & Paula Bentinck-Smith, Jay & Cindy Brown, Amanda Cross, George & Wendy’s Seafood Grille, Island Cinema, Sanibel Catering by Bailey’s, Trader’s Store & Café, Don & Ann-Marie Wildman; **Defender Level:** Big Red Q Quickprint, Cast About Charters, Mike & Terry Baldwin, Doug & Sherry Gentry, Greenwood Consulting Company, Phyllis & Glen Grisham, Gulf Coast Landscape Supply, Hightower Advisors Fort Myers, Dick & Emily Muench, Queenie’s Ice Cream, Sanibel Sweet Shoppe, TradeMarky Films, Vortex Optics.

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 proceeds.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit www.dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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