

# PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: The refuge's education programming inspires and converts thousands of new conservation stewards each year.

## **Dollar-for-dollar challenge grant comes to refuge education aid**

Because of the federal freeze on hiring, J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island is unable to fill its current vacancy for an education specialist. "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) has received a grant that will match funds raised to support the salary of an experienced, full-time wildlife educator to work with refuge staff for a period of at least one year.

For every dollar DDWS raises for the effort, the grant will match it with \$1 up to \$20,000 to pay a teacher's \$40,000 annual salary. Without this funding, the refuge would be forced to cut much of its educational programming for the thousands of students who arrive each year by bus and the nearly one million annual visitors to the refuge.

"Education has always been a top mission for the refuge," said supervisory refuge ranger Toni Westland. "Since February, when Ranger Becky Larkins transferred to a different refuge, we have been without a lead educator. We are so grateful to our friends group for working out a solution with us."

Seeking a total of \$20,000 in donations towards the effort, DDWS to date has received \$11,000 and is hoping to raise another \$9,000 by Aug. 15, 2017.

"Like the refuge, the society places conservation education at the top of its priorities," said DDWS executive director Birgie Miller. "The absence of an education specialist has stressed the workload of the remaining refuge staff and will continue to do so until the freeze is lifted. We welcome and thank community support in this effort to create future conservation stewards who will continue our mission in years and generations to come."

To make a donation toward conservation education staffing or for more information, contact Miller at 239-292-0566 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org). You can donate online by visiting [dingdarlingsociety.org/donation](http://dingdarlingsociety.org/donation) and designating, under “Gift Comments,” that your donation is to be used for the education grant match.

#### 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 [dingdarlingsociety.org](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

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