

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release.

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Caption: Bike, hike, or tram the refuge on Friday, Oct. 20, and have Wildlife Drive virtually to yourself.

Refuge offers 3 Wildlife Drive free-access days during ‘Ding’ Days’

Despite hurricane damage to the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge inflicted by Irma on Sanibel Island, staff still plans to celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week with “Ding” Darling Days, Oct. 15-22. The refuge will open admission to Wildlife Drive for free to all traffic for two days during that week, and to only biking and hiking traffic on Friday, Oct. 21. (The drive normally closes to all traffic on Fridays.)

On Sunday, Oct. 15, the drive is open for free to all visitors during “Ding” Days’ kick-off Family Fun Day. In addition, Tarpon Bay Explorers (TBE), the refuge’s recreation concession, will be offering free narrated 60-minute tram tours of the drive on a first-come basis to those who sign up that day. Note: This is the only day free general tram tours will be offered.

If you’ve ever dreamed of exploring Wildlife Drive without the usual people and traffic that its birds and other sights attract, mark Friday, Oct. 20, on your calendar.

Besides hikers and bikers, special discounted tram tours are allowed in that day – the only Friday of the year public trams travel the drive.

Pedestrians and cyclists are admitted free of charge that day. Tram passengers receive a 25 percent discount Friday and during the week: \$9.75 for adults, \$6 for children for the 90-minute narrated tour. Reservations are recommended at 239-472-8900 for Monday through Saturday of “Ding” Days.

Admission to Wildlife Drive is free for vehicular as well as bike and foot traffic the following day, Saturday, Oct. 21 – Conservation Art Day, when plein-air artists will be painting along the drive. Call ahead to 239-472-8900 to make reservations for the free two-hour Photography Tram Tour that departs at 3 p.m. that day.

In addition to these free access days, the refuge conducts Birds & Wildlife Tour Caravans with free Wildlife Drive admission Monday through Thursday at 9:30 a.m.

Wildlife Drive is open daily from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. during “Ding” Darling Days. Friday, it is closed to all private motorized traffic.

Callout/Side note: Prior to “Ding” Darling Days, Wildlife Drive will be open fee-free on Saturday, Sept. 30, for National Public Lands Day and on Sunday, Oct. 8, for National Wildlife Refuge Day.

For Tarpon Bay Tram Tour schedules throughout “Ding” Days week, please call 239-472-8900 or visit www.tarponbayexplorers.com. For a full “Ding” Darling Days schedule, visit www.dingdarlingdays.com, or call 239-472-1100.

“Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) sponsors “Ding” Darling Days with support from TBE, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and other private and business partners.

The following businesses and individuals support this year’s “Ding” Darling Days. **ROSEATE SPOONBILL SPONSORS:** Doc’s Ford Sanibel Rum Bar & Grille; **GREAT EGRET SPONSORS:** Blue Giraffe Island Dining, Wayne & Linda Boyd, Gardner Families, Jim & Patty Sprankle; **GREAT BLUE HERON SPONSORS:** 97.7 Latino & Juan Radio, Andrew Thompson Company, Bailey’s General Store, Mike & Terry Baldwin, Bank of the Islands, Cape Coral Kiwanis Club, Island Condo Maintenance, Island Sun, Panther Printing, Sanibel Captiva Beach Resorts, Sanibel Captiva Community Bank, Sanibel Captiva Rotary Club, Sanibel Moorings, Santiva Chronicle, Sunny Day Guide; **REDDISH EGRET SPONSORS:** Sarah Ashton & Jim Metzler, In Memory of Roger Bell, Blu Site Solutions, Casa Ybel Resort, Art & Susan Cassell,

Cedar Chest Fine Jewelry, Jerry Edelman & Maryanne Daly, Sally & Rich Ennis, Florida Weekly, Phyllis Gresham, Grounds by Green Ways, Intech Printing & Direct Mail, Island Inn, Jensen's on the Gulf and Marina & Cottages, Mitchell's Sand Castles, Muench Families & Periwinkle Park, Painting With a Twist, Sanibel-Captiva Kiwanis Club, Roberta and Realtor David Schuldenfrei, Stewart and Sons Insurance, Inc., TopBirdingTours.com; **SNOWY EGRET SPONSORS:** Ambu Yoga, Barefoot Charley's Painting Co., Big Red Q Quickprint, John Brennan, The Butterfly Estates, Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP), Colony Inn, Henderson Franklin Attorneys at Law, Island Therapy Center, Marina Customer Service Training, Sanibel Art & Frame, Sanibel School Steel Drumming Band, George & Wendy Schnapp, Jim & Anne Scott, Seashells.com, Vasanta Senerat, Winston & Barbara Spurgeon, Tents 'n' Events, Chelle Koster Walton.

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 or contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566, 239-472-1100 ext. 4, or dingdarlingsociety@gmail.com.

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