

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release.

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Caption: Make reservations today for the free birding tram to Bunche Beach.

Bunche Beach Birding Tram, ranger tours highlights of ‘Ding’ Days Friday

“Let’s Get Outside Day” kicks off this year’s weekend-long “Ding” Darling Days on Friday, Oct. 12, at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island. The free Bunche Beach Birding Tram departs from the refuge at 8 a.m. to experience low tide at the active birding park. The three-hour tour is an annual highlight of “Ding” Days, and spaces are limited, so make reservations with Tarpon Bay Explorers (TBE) in advance at 239-472-8900.

The Bunche Beach tour is one of a number of special activities scheduled that day. Although Wildlife Drive is normally closed on Fridays, the refuge is allowing free admission to cyclists and hikers from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. You can also gain admission aboard five special, discounted tram tours that day. Cost is \$9.75 for adults, \$6 for children. Reservations are recommended. Private vehicles are not allowed on the drive that day.

At 9 a.m., conservation educator Sara Hallas leads a free Beach Walk at Perry Tract, adjacent to Gulfside City Park. (City parking fees apply.) Ranger-led tours include a 9:30 a.m. free Refuge Birds & Wildlife Tour Caravan with Ranger Jeff Combs, a 10 a.m. free bike tour of Wildlife Drive with Ranger Toni Westland, and a 1 p.m. free Hike & Storytime at Wildlife Education Boardwalk with Ranger Monica Scroggin.

At 1 p.m., a free showing of Animal Planet’s film *Million Dollar Duck* takes place in the “Ding” Darling Visitor & Education Center (EC). Winner of the coveted Audience Award for Best Documentary Feature and the Jury Award for Documentary Feature at the 2016 Slamdance Film Festival, the amusing film follows artists through the trials and tribulations of competing in the “Olympics of wildlife art” and the prospect of earning a million dollars as a result of winning the annual contest. The refuge’s namesake, Jay Norwood “Ding” Darling, started the federal duck stamp program in 1934.

TBE will offer other discounted kayak and boat tours throughout the day. See the schedule below for times, and call 239-472-8900 or visit www.tarponbayexplorers.com for reservations. For a full “Ding” Darling Days’ Oct. 12-14 schedule, visit www.dingdarlingdays.com.

Friday, Oct. 12: LET’S GET OUTSIDE DAY

7:30am-6:30pm Wildlife Drive is open FREE to hikers/bikers only; closed to vehicular traffic except special, discounted TBE trams throughout the day

8-11am Free Bunche Beach Birding Tram, meet at EC flagpole

8:30-10am 25 percent off Breakfast Nature & Sea Life Cruise, TBE

9-10am Free Beach Walk at Perry Tract with Educator Sara Hallas. Meet at Gulfside City Park pay station, city parking fees apply.

9:30-11am Free Refuge Birds & Wildlife Tour Caravan with Ranger Jeff Combs, meet at EC flagpole

10am-12noon 25 percent off Low Tide Paddling Tour, TBE

10am, 11:30am, 1pm, 2:30pm, 4pm 25 percent off special Friday Narrated TBE Wildlife Drive Tram Tours

Ongoing 10am-3pm Free Animal Olympics Games at Bailey Tract, self-guided, Tarpon Bay Road

10am-11:30am Free Refuge Bike Tour with Ranger Toni Westland, meet at EC flagpole

11am-12:30pm 25 percent off Sea Life & Nature Cruise, TBE

1-2pm Free Showing of *Million Dollar Duck* Film, EC Auditorium

1pm-2pm Free Hike & Storytime at Wildlife Education Boardwalk with Ranger Monica Scroggin, meet at EC flagpole

1-3pm 25 percent off Commodore Creek Paddle, TBE

1:30-3pm 25 percent off Sea Life & Nature Cruise, TBE

5-7pm 25 percent off Sunset Rookery Kayak Tour, TBE (experience necessary)

5-7pm 25 percent off Evening Sea Life & Nature Cruise, TBE

“Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) presents “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: Wayne & Linda Boyd, Jim & Patty Sprankle; **GREAT BLUE HERON SPONSORS:** Bailey's General Store, Mike & Terry Baldwin, Bank of the Islands, Island Sun, Sanibel Captiva Beach Resorts, Sanibel Captiva Rotary Club, Sanibel Moorings, Sunny Day Guide; **REDDISH EGRET SPONSORS:** Sarah Ashton - Realtor, RE/MAX of the Islands, Casa Ybel Resort, Chicago Midwest Claims, Inc., Jerry Edelman & Maryanne Daly, The Gresham Family, Jensen's on the Gulf and Marina & Cottages, Tiffani Kaliko and John Silvia, Mitchell's Sand Castles, Palm Printing, Sanibel-Captiva Kiwanis Club, George & Wendy Schnapp, Winston & Barbara Spurgeon; **SNOWY EGRET SPONSORS:** Ambu Yoga, Anisa Stewart Jewelry, Colony Inn, Bob & Kemba DeGroot, John & Anette Gritti, Dave Horton, Island Therapy Center, Panther Printing, Jim & Anne Scott, Santiva Chronicle, Nancy Tome.

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 239-472-1100 ext. 4, or dingdarlingsociety@gmail.com.

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