

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release.

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Caption (Images available upon request)

‘Ding’ Darling lecture to follow python hunters, researcher

Researchers believe Burmese pythons have decimated their food supply of prey in the eastern Everglades and Miami-Dade County, says Michael Kirkland, python program manager for the South Florida Water Management District (SWFMD). In response, he has expanded SWFMD’s python elimination program, deploying python hunters into Collier County, to where the snakes are moving to find more prey.

He, along with three hunters, presents two “Pythons: The Hunters, the Science” programs at J.N. ‘Ding’ Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island on Friday, March 22, at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. -- part of the 2019 “Ding” Darling Friday Lecture series.

“That’s part of the reason we do this,” said Geoff Roepstorff, who hunts the nuisance snakes, often with his wife Robbie, both owners of the Bank of the Islands on Sanibel. “Living on Sanibel, those things are moving that way, there’s no doubt. They are definitely established in Collier County and are headed to Lee County.”

“We used to find birds, ducks, deer, rabbits, otters, and raccoons,” said Dusty “Wildman” Crum, who largely captures snakes – typically barefoot -- in the eastern Everglades. “Where I’ve been hunting, there are none of these animals left.”

Crum, who has appeared in a number of television spots, including on the *Today Show* late 2017 and *Swamp Mysteries* on the History Channel in June 2018, and the Roepstorffs will appear with Kirkland for a panel discussion of solutions to the problem from the perspective of science and hunting.

HighTower/Thomas & Swartz Wealth Management sponsors the 11-lecture series with support from the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS). The free lectures are held twice each Friday through April 12 at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. The season’s remaining schedule is listed below.

Lectures take place in the admission-free “Ding” Darling Visitor & Education Center. Seating for the lectures is limited and available on a first-come basis. Early arrivals can save their seat and one extra with personal items and then can explore the Visitor & Education Center or Indigo Trail before the lecture starts. Saved seats must be filled 15 minutes before lecture time or they will be assigned to the people waiting next in line.

As usual, Wildlife Drive closes on Friday, but visitors are welcome to enjoy the Visitor & Education Center, Indigo Trail, and recreational opportunities at Tarpon Bay Explorers, the refuge’s official recreation concession located at its Tarpon Bay Recreation Area.

Note: Opinions expressed in guest lectures do not necessarily reflect the views of refuge and DDWS management, staff, and board of directors.

For more information, call 239-472-1100 ext. 241 or log on to dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/lecture-and-film-series.

March 22 – Dusty “Wildman” Crum, Robbie & Geoff Roepstorff, Mike Kirkland, “Pythons: The Hunters, the Science”

March 29 – Marine scientist Lauren Blickley , "Drastic Plastic - Turning the Tide on Plastic Pollution"

April 5 – Ornithologist Dr. Jerry Lorenz, “Flamingos & Spoonbills: Pink Canaries in a Coal Mine”

*April 12 – Author Denege Patterson, “Five Islands Never Flooded: A Tour of the Islands of Pine Island Sound”

*starred lecture indicates book signing to follow

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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