

JUSTIN GOLE

I will always be grateful for the personal and professional growth I was lucky enough to experience during my short time working with the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society. I was exposed to J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge as an intern with the American Conservation Experience during December of 2018. When I heard there was an opening in the environmental education team that lined up with my previous internship starting, I could not believe the serendipitous coincidence.

I was blessed to work under the great leadership of Sara Hallas, and be immersed into one of the most progressive environmental education teams of the fifteen I was exposed to during my previous internship. The daily use of experiential learning techniques that we implemented with the visiting school groups was great in developing my skills further. Being a part of one of the first years of this progressive approach at “Ding” was incredible.

The most exciting part was watching Sara steer the program forward by utilizing resources and ideas from other National Wildlife Refuges we communicated with. Sara had a strong desire to go from more of a focus on volume of contacts to quality of contact with students. Due to my depth of experience with the refuge system I was able to get her in touch with other visitor service programs across the system.

I will be excited to see how the inspiration she drew from other programs such as John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge and Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge continue to impact the program. I am especially excited to hear about how the relationship with the Star Teacher she is partnering with blossoms into an area for growth into more quality rather than just quantity impact in the Lee County School District.

I know with the leadership of Sara and the support of the “Ding Darling” Wildlife Society, that the program is in good hands. I am grateful for my time as an intern, and cannot wait to visit “Ding” again.

Sincerely,
Justin Gole
June, 2019