

# Elizabeth “Izzy” Garcia

December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019

To the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society:

It has been a privilege to work as an Environmental Education intern at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. I am grateful for the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society for funding my position and the environmental education team with grants from generous donors. Thanks to their kindness, the refuge can offer paid internships to provide young individuals with experiences to kick start their early wildlife and environmental careers.

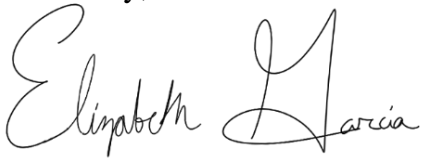
Over the course of the internship, I developed a summer program about Florida’s snakes with an emphasis on debunking myths. I lead class field trips on refuge property as well as trail and beach walks. I also coordinated events for wildlife holidays including World Sea Turtle Day, World Snake Day, and World Animal Day. The flexibility of my schedule allowed me to participate with other department tasks including gopher tortoise burrow surveys with the biology team, monofilament extractions in the mangroves with Mind Your Line, and meeting donors afterhours at society events such as Holiday Shopping Night.

Working with children from all grade levels and backgrounds made each field trip a unique experience. It didn’t matter if it was the same school all week, every class offered a new perspective, and every day I learned something about myself and the natural world. Most of the children we work with come from Title 1 schools in communities where there is little exposure to the diverse wildlife of Southwest Florida. As the bus crosses over the Causeway Bridge, it is the first time many of the students have ever seen the Gulf of Mexico. By the time they step off the bus, their understanding of the natural world is expanded as they see osprey flying overhead and anoles running along the ground. Their excitement is very genuine and contagious; being a part of these moments and teaching them about the wildlife ecology of Sanibel Island was truly an honor.

All these experiences have created an opportunity for me to grow as a person and a professional. The welcoming environment of the refuge staff truly made me feel like a valued and impactful member of the “Ding” community. Sara Hallas, my supervisor, made it her mission to provide the most rewarding and beneficial working experience, always asking me what I wanted to gain from my internship and how she could make it a reality.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to be part of the “Ding” family! Even though I am leaving my position, I will always carry with me the memories and knowledge I obtained during my stay here at the beautiful J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Garcia". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name below it.

Elizabeth “Izzy” Garcia