



SUMMER 2022

Society Pages

News from Friends of
the J.N. "Ding" Darling
National Wildlife Refuge

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, the non-profit Friends of the Refuge organization, supports the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex through the generation of independent funds to undertake student education, internships, research projects, informational literature, advocacy, land acquisition, and facility enhancements. Efforts may extend beyond the Complex's borders and involve partnerships with like-minded conservation organizations.

OCTOBER 29: SAVE THE DATE FOR ART IN THE WILD

In celebration of National Wildlife Refuge Week, "Ding" Darling's birthday, and the 40th anniversary of DDWS, "Ding" Darling introduces Art in the Wild at the Refuge on Saturday, October 29. Stay tuned for announcements about activities honoring the 2022-2023 Duck Stamp artists and the legacy of Refuge namesake Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, a Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist of the early 20th century. Our 2022-2023 Artist in Residence Jacqui Roch will be on hand to lead nature-art demos and workshops, plus expect photo contest winners announcement, anniversary treats and other surprises. Admission to Wildlife Drive will be free that day.



DDWS Year of the Anhinga on a Roll



Above: Ranger Toni Westland took a dunking for the cause at "Ding" Day Conservation Carnival. Above right: DDWS brought back the gala Project Refuge: A Couture Fashion Show Using Trash to celebrate its 40th anniversary.



Scott McPhee

Oh, What a Spring!

2022 rolls on as the Year of the Anhinga, continuing to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society on October 6. Three fabulous landmark highlights of the 40th year took place this spring: Project Refuge: A Couture Fashion Show Using Trash on March 30, "Ding" Darling Day Conservation Carnival on April 24, and the 10th annual "Ding" Darling and Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament.

Project Refuge debuted in 2019 to celebrate the Refuge's 75th anniversary and raise awareness for recycling.

It spawned the encore 2022 fashion show and two separate exhibitions to showcase 18 amazing designs from the two runway shows.

The new Tribby Arts Center at Shell Point Retirement Community exhibited its "Castoffs to Couture: Selections from Project Refuge of the 'Ding' Darling Wildlife Society" to the public in May and June. Following its exhibition at Shell Point, the "Upcycled Wonders: Project Refuge Designs Exhibition" comes home for display at the "Ding" Darling Visitor & Education Center July 5 through August 30 daily 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

2022 also marks a milestone achievement for "Ding" Darling Day. In its 33rd year, the event moved off-island as part of the Refuge's outreach mission. It visited Lakes Park in Fort Myers with the theme Conservation Carni-

Continued on page 6



COTI President Larry Schoop (middle) and Board Member Barbara Joy Cooley award John McCabe.

John McCabe COTI Citizen of the Year

On March 17, COTI (Committee of the Islands) awarded our own John McCabe, DDWS Past President and Emeritus Board Member, the well-deserved honor as the islands' Citizen of the Year.

"As a retired physician, John has taken his talent of listening and processing of information into the realm of conservation," said Barbara Joy Cooley, COTI Board Member and John's neighbor. "He is that quiet leader who finds ways to get people to work together toward a common goal of protecting our natural resources. He takes the ego out of the equation and has demonstrated the impact of effective partnerships. His quiet demeanor, passion for the mission, patience, and persistence while working toward the end goal are what have made John so effective for the 'Ding' Darling Refuge complex in all areas, but in particular, in land acquisition."

Over the years, John has been instrumental in acquiring more than 100 acres of Sanibel property to protect under Refuge auspices, beginning in 2013 with the 6.56-acre Woodring Point, ending with this year's 8.5-acre Boone property, and including the 2019 68-acre Wulfert/Lee Anne Tauck Conservation Tract.

"Were it not for John McCabe and his passion for conservation and land preservation this island would be a different place," concluded Cooley at the award presentation.

Spring Biology Report

Each month, Refuge Biological Science Technician Avery Renshaw reports on Refuge biology activities.

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society supports her position. To help fund Avery's role and wildlife research at the Refuge, contact Sierra Hoisington at 239-472-1100 ext. 233.

- In May, I volunteered to help the 2022 Invasive Fish Roundup Event with the Southwest Florida CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area). The goal of the event is to encourage the public to target invasive species while fishing and to promote awareness of the potential negative impacts of releasing invasive species into Florida's waterways. A total of 29 teams caught 1,884 pounds of non-native fish species including Myan Cichlids and Sailfin Catfish.

- The Refuge participated in another round of Sanibel Island Rice Rat trapping. We are continuing this effort in the marsh areas of the Refuge using bucket trap cameras to monitor the rat, which is exclusive to Sanibel.

- On May 19, two rehabilitated Killdeer were successfully released back to the wild at the Refuge. The siblings were admitted as nestlings to the Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW) on Sanibel Island on April 14 after being found in an abandoned box with a note at The Wonder Gardens in Bonita Springs. The Refuge was happy to work with CROW to facilitate the release of the young Killdeer.

- I'm happy to report that our biology department now owns two Canon image stabilizing binoculars thanks to DDWS. They are especially helpful for seeing nests on rookery islands from moving watercraft.

DID YOU KNOW?

Roseate Spoonbills inhabit the Refuge year-round. Adults will leave the Refuge in the summer to go nest elsewhere in the state, while some immature birds will stay in the area to spend the warm months.

- Wildlife Drive bird surveys continue. We are starting to see less bird activity as summer creeps up. We have said our goodbyes to the last American White Pelicans and adult Roseate Spoonbills.

- I assisted in the Benedict Key oyster reef and mangrove restoration trip led by SCCF. Benedict Key is a Refuge-owned island that was decimated by Hurricane Charley, and restoration efforts are taking place to return the habitat to its original glory. The process includes dumping oyster shell and planting mangrove seedlings. Of course, these mangroves will eventually provide nesting structure for colonial wading and water birds, stabilize the sediment, and deter erosion. The oyster reef is being put down in front of these mangrove plantings to attenuate wave action to ensure the mangrove seedlings have a chance to establish themselves.



Shane Amick

Bio tech Avery Renshaw works on oyster reef and mangrove restoration.

- Bird-nesting season began in April. Along Indigo Trail, wading birds such as Green Herons, Yellow-crowned Night Herons, and Tricolored Herons began making their nests, laying eggs, and waiting for the chicks to hatch. Killdeer nests have also begun hatching on the Refuge.

- In March, Little Blue Heron study continued at the Refuge, a collaboration with the Harte Research Institute of Texas A & M Corpus Christi. Little Blue Herons and other wading birds have been used as indicator species for a variety of wetland ecosystems, as this group provides clear and rapid responses to changes in environmental conditions. Compared to other species, Little Blue Heron movement patterns outside of the breeding season are poorly understood. Data collected from transmitters allow researchers to identify important areas for Little Blue Herons — including nest colonies, nocturnal roosts, and migration routes.

- For the third year, the Refuge partnered with SCCF on its macroalgae collection off Wildlife Drive. Macroalgal blooms, fueled by increased nutrients in the water, are an emerging issue here in Southwest Florida. These blooms have multiple negative direct (i.e., competition for resources) and indirect (i.e., light reduction, hypoxia, or insufficient oxygen) impacts on seagrasses.

We Want Your DDWS Memories

As we progress closer to the 40th anniversary of the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society's chartering on October 6, we are making plans for a special retrospect in our fall Society Pages quarterly newsletter. As a staffer, board member, volunteer, donor, or friend of DDWS, do you have one specific memory that stands out and you can share? Please contact Chelle Koster Walton at chellekwalton@gmail.com to submit. Photos are especially welcome.

An artist rendering of The Roost



The Roost Revealed

Final designs are in the works for a new \$1 million-plus project that will greet Refuge visitors with outdoor flex space for a broad spectrum of educational purposes. DDWS plans to break ground on The Roost — an accessible, inclusive, safe, and welcoming learning pavilion adjacent to the entrance ramp to the Visitor & Education Center — later this summer.

"Ever since COVID hit, open-air space for Refuge programming has become a top priority," said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. "We have raised most of the funds to get started on the project, but we are still looking for at least another \$100,000 to bring The Roost up to the highest standards of green construction and

operation and to support its programming."

The 4,670-square-foot pavilion, designed by Sanibel Island architect Amy Nowacki, will be constructed of innovative earth-friendly materials with solar panels that will provide electricity for its lighting and paddle fans. Incorporating design elements from nature, it will serve as an outdoor classroom for visiting school and other groups. DDWS also foresees creative new uses that reflect the Refuge's arts legacy and experiential mission, including music and art events, puppet shows, lectures, mindfulness classes, and culture-driven programs.

The larger of the two covered, open-sided spaces will measure 1,900 square feet with removeable seating. A

separate, 350-square-foot area will contain three separate spaces for small-group gatherings and places for visitors to gather and rest on their own while they explore the Refuge.

"Its name, The Roost, alludes to the pavilion's welcoming appeal," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who led the design and programmatic plans along with DDWS Associate Executive Director Sierra Hoisington. "Like the Refuge's rookery islands, it invites in individuals of all types in a safe, easily accessible place to rest, soak up nature, and relax in the intrinsic beauty of the setting. It makes a perfect transition from the parking lot to the indoor Visitor & Education Center or their journey into the Refuge."

As part of the project, the outdoor entryway kiosk will undergo a refresh, and DDWS is exploring opportunities for electric-vehicle solar recharge stations. Interpretation will educate visitors about solar energy and other alternative energy sources.

"Our Visitor & Education Center is a fabulous resource, but The Roost will allow visitors to extend their time in the open, fresh air while taking advantage of free programming," said Birgie. "We had donors step up to turn this idea into a reality so that we could move forward with its construction. The additional amounts we hope to raise will enhance the construction. Anyone interested in supporting the eco-friendly facility and its future educational mission can contact me directly at 239-292-0566."

2022-23 Artist in Residence

"Ding" Darling began an artist-in-residence program in 2019 as part of its 75th Anniversary Celebration, with plans to continue it in years to follow. As Fort Myers artist Rachel Pierce finishes her term, started in 2021 but delayed by COVID complications, the Refuge, with support from the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), announces Miami artist Jacqueline Roch for its 2022-2023 program.

Born in California and raised on Miami Beach, Jacqui terms her style "tropical realism." Her greatest local inspiration has been, she says, the Everglades and Big Cypress National Preserve, where she spends much of her time painting plein air. She has recently found inspiration, too, at "Ding" Darling.

"One of my first pastel paintings was of a small area on Wildlife Drive that shows some mangroves and that dark clear water," said Jacqui. "I titled it Looking for Snook, and it is one of the few paintings I still have in my possession. It is one of my husband's favorites and he has hung it in our sons' nursery for each of their births."

Jacqui's fine art pastels capture Florida's natural beauty — from River of Grass panoramas to detailed portraits of flowers and seashells. She considers herself a purist with pastels, using no other embellishments for her works and never reproducing her art. Every piece is one-of-a-kind.

With a background in art education from the Uni-

versity of Miami and Florida International University in Miami, Jacqui has been teaching art since 1992, starting in the Miami-Dade County School District. She currently teaches at Miami's Bakehouse Art Complex. She plans to offer her artist-in-residence programs and activities during weekend and other visits to "Ding" Darling through June 30, 2023.

Jacqui has already stepped into her new role as a plein-air demonstrator at "Ding" Darling Day at Lakes Park on April 24. She will appear regularly at the Refuge in coming months to do pop-up, plein-air painting along Wildlife Drive; teach art to children and adults on-site and through digital media; visit youth facilities to help create art; and mount an exhibition of her refuge-inspired and other wildlife art from September 1 to the end of October 2022, in the Visitor & Education Center auditorium, as has become artist-in-residence tradition.

"I am so thrilled to be able to call myself artist in residence at this wonderful, natural oasis," Jacqui said. "It's like getting the backstage pass to meet your favorite band. You really get to immerse yourself in a space that may sometimes be off limits to most and, even better, you meet the people who live and work so hard to maintain the space."

"Our Refuge was created by conservation artist Jay Norwood 'Ding' Darling in 1945, so our artist-in-residence program honors that history and tradition," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. "Darling



Jacqui Roch made her debut appearance as "Ding" Darling's artist in residence at "Ding" Darling Day in April at Lakes Park.

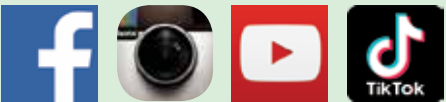
created the Federal Duck Stamp program and designed the first duck stamp and the refuge system's Blue Goose logo. He won the Pulitzer Prize twice for his political cartoons, which were syndicated across the country throughout five decades in the early 1900s."

The Refuge's artist program began in 2019 with Idaho wildlife journal artist Ed Anderson, who worked with children from Quality Life Center of Southwest Florida in Fort Myers and Pace Center for Girls — Lee County plus visitors to the Refuge for his special programs and exhibition. Pierce continued the tradition, creating a Community Mural at the Refuge with the help and hands of residents and visitors of all ages.

For more information about the "Ding" Darling artist-in-residence program, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/artist-in-residence.

Now on TikTok FOLLOW US!

To "like" us on **Facebook** (along with more than 17,000 others), search for "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society. (You can also "like" the Refuge by searching for its "Official" page.) Follow us on **Instagram**, where we have 19,000-plus followers, at @dingdarlingwildlifesociety. Our new **TikTok** page is garnering giggles and appreciation; hop aboard at @dingdarlingsociety. Also visit our **YouTube** channel by searching "ding darling wildlife society."



MEMORIAL AND HONOR GIFTS

February 16, 2021 – May 31, 2022

Memorial gifts and gifts made in honor of special occasions are a wonderful way to pay tribute to family and friends who are important to us. Throughout the year, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society has received gifts in memory and in honor of loved ones. Thank you to everyone who supported the Refuge in this thoughtful and meaningful way.

We recently received gifts in MEMORY of the following:

Paula Albert	Sheila Hunt
Rose Alexander	Glenna Irwin
Paul D. Andrews	Barbara Kennedy
Catherine F. Andrews	James E. Kowalski
Wyman Atkins	Barry & Francine Litofsky
Vernon & Clara Baltus	Cristin Marriott
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Daniel J. Benyus	Bradley Norpell
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Betty & Don Bruce	Bill & Jeanne Rankin
Barbara Ann Carter	Phyllis Jean Russell
Jean H. Chapman-Castle	Jean & Joseph Sawtelle
Wayne L. Clevenger	Linda Scherer
Fenway Coleman	Fran Spencer
Bill Dunford	Addie Starck
Dorothy Atkinson Ela	Elizabeth Ann Sullivan
Dr. Betty Gazda-Smith	Raven Taverna
Wayne Reid Goforth	Breese Tornick
Barry Gordon	Blanche Uhrir
Marilyn M. Hare	Barbara Webb
Dr. Melva Jo Hendrix	Marshall E. Woodruff
Shelley Hudson	

We recently received gifts in HONOR of the following:

Mark & Colleen Boyer	Bob Moore
Linda & Wayne Boyd	Michael Albert Netel
Sue Danford	Lezlie Oachs
Jeffrey Grummel	Tom & Donna Puma
Doris D. Hardy	Allan Sacks
Amanda Hockensmith	Jim Sprinkle
Kevin Holman	Anne Suss
John & Wendy Kindig	Max & Isaac Traggis-Loughman
Benjamin Kutas	Karl Werner
Joel & Wandrea Lauchner	Aubrey White
Stanley Levine	

TARPON BAY EXPLORERS

The Refuge recreation concession offers tram tours of Wildlife Drive, paddling and nature-cruise tours, and fishing charters, plus rentals of bikes, kayaks, paddleboards, canoes, and pontoon boats. Visit tarponbayexplorers.com or call 239-472-8900 for a schedule and to make reservations.



Louise Crumpacker (center) and her family

Endowed Conservation Fund

Louise Crumpacker understands the importance of preserving the environment through green spaces, where visitors can learn about and engage with nature. That's why she has set up an endowment fund through DDWS to strengthen visitor services and the educational experience at “Ding” Darling.

“We will conserve only what we love, and we love only what we understand,” says Louise, who has had first-hand experience with educating the public about conservation as a volunteer naturalist at Manatee Park in Fort Myers. “We understand only what we have learned.”

Louise, who has been enjoying Sanibel with her family since the mid-1950s, passes on her wonder for nature and love of the wilds and wildlife to her children and grandchildren, serving as a model example for future generations.

“My mother has always been fascinated with exploring all forms of life, and she has always embraced the outdoors and all things wild, and she instilled that love in us,” said her daughter, Janeen Overman. “Our family is thrilled to see her excitement as she makes this contribution at ‘Ding’ Darling in a way that truly matters to her.”

“Louise often has brought her family to ‘Ding’ Darling and continues to visit on a regular basis,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who oversees

Visitor Services. “She has a true admiration for our nation's best restrooms at the Visitor & Education Center and for the overall impact of the services offered to her and her family when they visit. It's wonderful to have this fund in Louise's name to help the Refuge in our ongoing work in creating positive visitor experiences.”

“An endowed fund will continue to keep Louise's legacy alive by supporting conservation education programs at the Refuge and inspiring our future stewards to embrace a community and value our natural spaces, much like she does,” said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. “We are so thankful to her and her family for this support. What a real way to demonstrate her commitment and how important protecting and educating are to the survival of the planet.”

Refuge donors are able to establish named endowed funds for \$10,000 or more and work with DDWS staff to designate them for their areas of interest or leave them as unrestricted. The endowments can fund individual projects or ongoing education, intern, programming, research, or other specific needs. To establish an endowed fund, contact Birgie at 239-472-1100 ext. 232. Visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/endowed-funds for more information.

Sad Farewell to a Faithful Friend

In March, the Refuge received this note from Mary McGregory, daughter of longtime Refuge volunteers Bill and Jeanne Rankin: “Wanted to let you know that Bill and Jeanne Rankin are together again and no doubt raising some hell in heaven.... Thanks for keeping them out of trouble.”

Jeanne, preceded in death by her husband, served on the Board of Directors for 14 years, from 1993 to 2007, and volunteered as a Rover, front desk attendee, and Nature Store volunteer for 30 years starting in 1992. She accumulated 10,538 hours of service. In 2018, the Rankins received the prestigious Founders Award for individuals who made a vital contribution to the success of the Society within the first 10 years of its foundation.

“We remember Bill and Jeanne most for their contributions in building the Visitor & Education Center back in 1999, and for being the self-appointed, unofficial



Jeanne and Bill at the unveiling of the crocodile exhibit

guardians of the Refuge's first crocodile of 24 years” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. The female croc, whom they dubbed “Madame,” died in 2010 and is memorialized in the Center in a display featuring her articulated skeleton.

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- you can change your plans at any time
- know you are helping to protect a beautiful National Wildlife Refuge

HOW TO SAY IT:

I give, devise and bequeath to The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, Inc. a Florida non-profit corporation, located on Sanibel Island, Florida" [written amount or percentage of the estate or description of property] for [designate the purpose, if desired, or leave blank for gifts to be used to address the greatest need].

WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU



239.472.1100 EXT. 4



dingdarlingsociety.org/
articles/leave-a-legacy



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2022 Scholarships Awarded

DDWS this May awarded \$33,700 in conservation education scholarships to 14 students from the surrounding five-county area. During its 16-year history, the DDWS Environmental Scholarship Program has awarded a total of \$233,200 to deserving students.

Eleven donors sponsored the 14 scholarships this year. They include the Richard Bailey Scholarship, Mike and Terry Baldwin Scholarship, Dr. Andrew and Laura Dahlem Scholarship, Dr. H. Randall Deming Endowed Scholarship for Conservation & Environmental Studies, "Ding" Darling Conservation Scholarship (anonymous donor), Leslie & Hans Fleischer Scholarships (two scholarships), Mary Elaine Jacobson Memorial Scholarship, Win and Marilyn Kloosterman Memorial Scholarship, Barry and Francine Litofsky



Four-time repeat recipient Mallory Poff works on her research project to design a solar-powered mobile cooling unit that meets agricultural standards for use on small farms.

Scholarship, Tarpon Bay Explorers Scholarship, and Jane Werner Endowed Environmental Scholarships (three scholarships).

DDWS will be awarding scholarships starting at \$1,000 each at the end of the 2021-2022 school year. High school seniors and college students living in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, and Hendry counties and pursuing careers in biology, conservation, and environmental studies are eligible.

WoW Report

May 23 wrapped up the 2021-2022 season for WoW (Wildlife on Wheels) mobile classroom — its first complete school year hitting elementary schools across the district. Urban Education Leader Melissa Maher, in a position wholly funded by DDWS, tallied some pretty impressive numbers about WoW's student outreach this year. In all, the team reached 7,060 Title 1 school students with its hands-on approach to teaching lessons that meet Florida's state standards. With one to two bilingual interns and Spanish-speaking Urban Ranger Janet So-



WoW brought smiles to the faces of more than 7,000 students this school year.

For an application and to read full descriptions of 2022 scholarship winners and donors, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/student-scholarships. Individuals and businesses interested in establishing a named scholarship of \$1,000 or more for 2022-2023 should contact Sierra Hoisington at 239-472-1100 ext. 233.

kolowski helping out, WoW's impact crosses language and cultural barriers throughout the district.

When not spending a week or more at the various schools, WoW visits local churches, community centers, and the Refuge for community outreach, which amounted to 3,340 individuals during a September through April time frame, including "Ding" Darling Day at Lakes Park on April 24.

During the summer, the team has already signed on for five summer-camp stints, including one at Lovers Key State Park, where WoW will be open for public touring during designated hours to be determined. Look for WoW appearances at the Refuge for Great American Outdoors Day on August 4.

"A great job from the WoW team!" said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who also participates in its school outreach. "It's dynamic, and it brings profound change to students' lives. I hope everyone takes advantage of opportunities to truly experience the WoW, so they can see how powerful it really is."

UPCOMING EVENTS

Free Summer Refuge Programs — Through August 6, 2022
"Ding" Marshals Sanibel Fourth of July Parade — July 4, 2022
Upcycled Wonders: Project Refuge Designs Exhibition — July 5-August 30, 2022
Great American Outdoors Act Day — August 4, 2022
Artist-in-Residence Jacqui Roch Exhibition - September 1 to October 31, 2022
National Public Lands Day at the Refuge — September 24, 2022
Art in the Wild Day at the Refuge — October 29, 2022

WILDLIFE SPOTLIGHT



Spring means nesting season at "Ding" Darling, and activity is particularly brisk and joyful at the Wildlife Education Boardwalk. Thanks to visitor Kristie Burns for this sweet photo of three Green Heron chicks.

DID YOU KNOW?

Green Heron hatchlings begin "branching" — climbing out of their nest and onto surrounding branches — 16 to 17 days after hatching. At 21 to 23 days old, they begin to fly.



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YEAR OF ANHINGA

continued from page 1

val – a collaboration with other environmental non-profits to educate while entertaining a new audience with the WoW (Wildlife on Wheels) mobile learning experience and nature-inspired games.

“This inaugural endeavor achieved exactly what we had hoped,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger, who chairs the “Ding” Darling Day committee. “It got the attention of kids and adults who aren’t familiar with the Refuge. It started that process of creating new conservation stewards who will carry on our mission beyond Refuge boundaries.”

The first-time achievements kept coming with the celebration of 10 years for the tarpon tournament. The competition surpassed the \$1 million mark for funds raised to support water and wildlife research and conservation education at the Refuge. This year’s tourney paid out \$60,000 in award monies – 100% of registration fees from the 58 teams that participated. Money raised for conservation efforts came from our generous sponsors (see the insert in this newsletter) and silent auction proceeds.

“We can’t thank Doc Ford’s enough for their incredible show of support these past ten years,” said DDWS Development Officer April Boehnen, who organized and led the 2022 tournament. “They’ve already committed for the 2023 tourney, and we look forward to working with them for the NEXT 10 years.”

To date, the tarpon tournament has raised \$1,015,000 for Refuge support. The first-of-its-kind tournament to benefit conservation and award 100 percent of its entry fees to winners, the competition began to support local professional fishing guides and connect with anglers to educate and make them part of conservation efforts. The 2023 tournament is scheduled for Friday, May 19, with the captain’s meeting on May 18 at Doc Ford’s on Fort Myers Beach.

“We are so grateful for this fundraiser, because not only does it add much-needed dollars to the ever-shrinking Refuge budget, it also supports our conservation mission,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. “Plus, it is an opportunity to remind anglers, both professional and amateur, about the importance of ethical and responsible fishing.”



The 10th annual “Ding” Darling and Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament surpassed \$1 million in earnings to date.



Shell Point’s new Tribbey Hall mounted an exhibition of Project Refuge Castoffs to Couture creations. The exhibition is now on display at the Refuge Visitor & Education Center.



Families enjoyed this year’s “Ding” Darling Day Conservation Carnival at Lakes Park in Fort Myers.



Conservation exhibitors educated kids with nature-inspired games at “Ding” Darling Day.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

The Continued Threat to Our Water Resources

by Jim Metzler, DDWS Advocacy Committee Co-Chair

The Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) is the newly developed manual for how water releases out of Lake Okeechobee will be managed in a way that balances the needs of all stakeholders.

In February, the Florida Senate’s Appropriations

Committee filed Senate Bill (SB) 2508 as a “budget conforming bill.” Filing this way means a bill can be sent to the Senate floor while only allowing one chance for public comment, bypassing the typical three to four committee hearings.

One of the many negative aspects of SB 2508 was its attempt to circumvent LOSOM by requiring that ag-

riculture gets all the water it needs, even if that hurts other stakeholders such as ‘Ding Darling. Another negative aspect of SB 2508 is that it threatened to hold up more than 300 million dollars of funding for Everglades restoration if it didn’t pass.

There was immediate pushback from a range of stakeholders, and many of the bill’s worst provisions were removed prior to the bill being passed. The governor, who early on opposed the bill, has yet to sign or veto the bill. Independent of what the governor does, it’s highly likely that similar bills will be filed in the future.

Volunteer Awards

Last year, the Refuge introduced the idea of a drive-through event in response to COVID-19 distancing protocols. It was such a success, the staff brought it back as the new volunteer appreciation format.

“Visitor Services Ranger Katy Hosokawa came up with a very creative solution,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. “We hosted a drive-through appreciation event on a Friday, when Wildlife Drive is closed to the public. The volunteers loved it so much, we repeated it this year with our April No Foolin’ Volunteers Appreciation Drive-Through on April 1. We invited the volunteers to drive by 13 stations where they played games, observed wildlife, and received gifts, awards, and lots of cheering and the enthusiastic gratitude they deserve.”

Refuge and DDWS staff and interns attended the stations. More than 90 volunteers participated with big smiles and compliments about the event.

“Of course, volunteer numbers were down this year due to COVID surges and because the Visitor & Education Center exhibits did not reopen until after annual statistics were tallied,” said Ranger Katy. “But we are mighty proud of our volunteer numbers, regardless.”

She reported that in fiscal year 2020-2021, 361 volunteers worked 18,522 hours at the Refuge, repre-

sending a labor and benefits savings of more than \$528,000. That amounts to the equivalent of more than nine full-time staffers.

DDWS formed in 1982 specifically to support a volunteer corps after the opening of the Refuge’s first visitor center in the administration building that year. More than 11,000 people visited in the first month once the center opened, overwhelming a staff unaccustomed to dealing with the inquisitive public.

“Volunteers stepped in then to fill in the gaps left by inadequate federal funding, and they continue to do so today as the budget remains insufficient,” said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller,

To the right is a list of volunteers who won awards for reaching hour and year achievement levels.



Doris Hardy received an award for 10,000 volunteer hours.



Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland and Nature Store Manager Chris Galloway greet drive-through volunteers.

YEARS AWARDS

20 years: Denny Souers

10 years: Judy Barbieri,

Carolyn Bergen, David

Keen, Judy Perkins, Tom

Ware, Jack Waszmer

Carl Greenbaum, Sandra

Greenbaum, Cindy Sea-

man, Jack Waszmer

500 hours: Richard Jones,

Sharon Jones

250 hours: Christine Colum-

bus, Rose Flaherty, Rick

Herbst, David Jeffries, Mary

Meyer, Trish Sutherland,

Randy Reed, Sandy Reed

150 hours: Christine

Columbus, Rick Herbst,

Robin Kirk, Delores Lob-

bato, Mary Meyer, Cristina

Shaul, Matt Shaul, Donna

Wilmot, Susie Wilson

HOURS AWARDS

10,000 hours: Doris Hardy

6,500 hours: Patty Wettstein

2,500 hours: Randy Reed,

Sandy Reed

2,000 hours: Janet Lucree

1,500 hours: Nancy Riley, Karl

Werner

1,000 hours: Lyndon Borror,

STAFF NEWS

Nature Store Staff

Christopher Galloway recently accepted a promotion from Nature Store assistant manager to manager of the online store and two physical shops on Sanibel Island. Chris began working for DDWS in December 2016 and has also held the position as assistant office manager and led the setup of ShopDingDarling.com last year. He steps into the position formerly held by Ann-Marie Wildman, who has moved into new roles within the organization.



“I feel privileged to have this fantastic team to work with, and I’m really excited to continue working to not only support the Refuge through store sales, but to be stewards for the Refuge in communicating with visitors to our stores,” said Chris. “We’ve made great strides in the past couple of years despite challenges, and I anticipate that we will continue pushing forward in our efforts.”

When COVID-19 shut down the original flagship Refuge Nature Store in the Visitor & Education Center in 2020, the DDWS team moved ahead to promote its fledgling e-commerce site and open a second store at 2250 Periwinkle Way, which also serves as a fulfillment center for online orders.

“Chris has become an invaluable member of the DDWS team in so many ways, we are excited to see him

continue in a heightened leadership role,” said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller.

The Nature Store team also welcomes a new parttime employee who mostly will be covering the 2250 Periwinkle location. Strongville, Ohio, native Jackie Aleandri retired after more than 20 years with the Cleveland Clinic Foundation Department of Pharmacy. She and her family (including Abby, an English pointer mix 4-year-old) now live on Sanibel Island.

“We have been visiting Sanibel and Captiva over 20 years. We decided Sanibel was our dream retirement island,” she said. “My favorite part of the islands is their strong conservation ethic.”

“With Chris, Carrie Harmon, and now Jackie as the lead Nature Store team, along with our many store volunteers, I have every confidence the Nature Store will continue to be a place for people to shop and make a difference with their purchases,” said Birgie.



Summer WoW Intern

Diana Iglesias recently joined the Refuge team, thanks to funding through DDWS. She will fill the role of bilingual interpreter and translator for the Refuge’s WoW (Wildlife on Wheels) mobile classroom and other educational “Ding” programs this summer, a role previously filled by

her brother, David, during the 2021-2022 school year.

Born in New York, Diana lived most of her life in Lima, Peru. She graduated from Pontifical Catholic University of Peru in Lima in 2016 with a bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering. Before moving to “Ding,” Diana worked in Peru five years in business and business intelligence and later in member services for United Healthcare.

“Diana is fluent in Spanish and English, so she will be such a valuable resource in helping us fulfill our mission to reach the local Latino community,” said “Ding” Darling Urban Education Leader Melissa Maher. “Our first priority with WoW outreach is to travel to Title 1 schools and other venues where kids and adults don’t have the opportunity to visit the Refuge.”

“I want to learn as much as I can about teaching,” said Diana. “I would like to dedicate my working life to teaching, and there is no better school than WoW, and there is no better teacher than Melissa. I hope to learn techniques and be able to develop professionally in this new area.”

DDWS provides living stipends and other benefits for about a dozen interns each year. For more information about the Refuge’s internship programs and supporting them, contact Sierra Hoisington, DDWS associate director, at 239-472-1100 ext. 233.





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FLORIDA JUNIOR DUCK STAMP JUDGING

The birthplace of the Federal Junior Duck Stamp Program, "Ding" Darling serves as headquarters for the Florida contest judging each year. On March 29, five judges met at the Refuge to cull through 1,248 entries from 15 schools and homeschool students to pick winners in four grade categories, along with Florida Best of Show. Congratulations to Mackenzie Warren, 17, from Titusville on her Best of Show oil/acrylic painting of a female Mallard titled "Tranquil Solitude," which went on to compete at the federal level.