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PRESS RELEASE

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Caption: Art, games, and nature make Conservation Carnival a hit with families and outdoor-lovers.

‘Ding’ Darling Day’s Conservation Carnival at Lakes Park celebrates Earth Day April 22

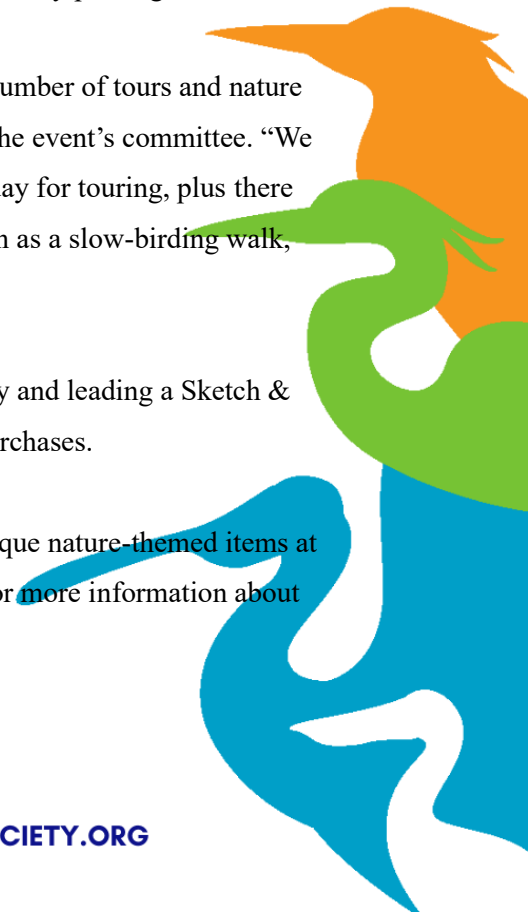
The J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge celebrates its 34th annual “Ding” Darling Day jointly with Earth Day at Lakes Park in Fort Myers Sunday, April 22. The refuge and “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) have planned a full day of Conservation Carnival and nature activities from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

More than 20 local conservation non-profits will be participating to engage visitors with information and carnival games. Gamers can earn a free mini ice cream cone, plus other gifts and prizes. The refuge hosts a Dunk Tank, where festival-goers can try their luck at sinking surprise “celebrity dunkees.” All activities are free, but Lakes Park charges a \$1 per hour, \$5 per day parking fee.

“The games will all have an educational component, plus the day brings a number of tours and nature art activities,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who chairs the event’s committee. “We will have our WoW Wildlife on Wheels mobile nature experience open all day for touring, plus there will be Earth Day crafts and lots of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, such as a slow-birding walk, archery, and rock climbing.”

Artist-in-residence Jacqui Roch will be painting plein-air throughout the day and leading a Sketch & Stroll journaling activity. The Dawg Pound truck will be on-site for food purchases.

A schedule of the day’s activities follows below. Attendees can shop for unique nature-themed items at the Refuge Nature Store table, where all purchases support conservation. For more information about the event, visit dingdarlingday.com.





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22, but Wildlife Drive, Tarpon Bay Explorers, and Bailey Tract will remain open.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) co-host “Ding” Darling Day with generous support from the local community and business sponsors:

Great Egret Sponsor: The Jenni & Kyle Foundation; **Snowy Egret Sponsors:** Gretchen Banks, The Dawg Pound, Gresham Family, Wheel Fun Rentals.

SCHEDULE OF FREE ACTIVITIES

(schedule subject to change)

- 10 a.m. “Ding” Darling Day opens at Lakes Park. Check in and receive information at Welcome Table in Main Pavilion.
- Ongoing (10 a.m.-2 p.m.) Nature-themed carnival games, the WoW (Wildlife on Wheels) mobile nature experience, live music, food truck, face-painting, rock-climbing, dunk tank, Hover-Ball Archery, live painting by "Ding" Darling's Artist in Residence Jacqui Roch, Wildlife Olympics, and Shell Art. PLUS, play games to win a coupon for a FREE mini ice cream cone.
- 10:30 a.m. Ranger-led Slow Birding*: 45minutes, 20-guest maximum
- 11 a.m. Ranger-led Kids Nature Walk: 45 minutes, 20-children maximum
- 11:30 a.m. Ranger-led Slow Birding*: 45minutes, 20-guest maximum
- 12:30 p.m. Sketch & Stroll: Nature Journaling with Artist in Residence Jacqui Roch, 45 minutes, 20-guest minimum

*Coined by Bridget Butler, "slow birding" is a fresh, slowed-down approach to traditional birding that welcomes deeper observation, listening, and connection to the birds and their environment.

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 profits. To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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