

"DING" DARLING WILDLIFE SOCIETY



ANNUAL REPORT 2020 / 2021



"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 support conservation education, internships, biology research, informational literature, advocacy, land acquisition and facility enhancements. Efforts may extend beyond the Complexes borders and involve partnerships with like-minded conservation organizations.

From the President

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS), thank you for supporting the conservation efforts at the Refuge during what was a challenging year for everyone. This annual report celebrates what philanthropy made possible in 2020/2021 and please know how appreciative we are for your support and that of so many others.

It was October, 1982 when the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society was established and when looking back through this history, I am humbled at what this organization has been able to accomplish.

Even during the unknowns of covid and how it affected the work we were doing to support the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex, our partnership was strong and we found ways to enhance and strengthen conservation partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other non-profits and organizations.

The philanthropic support received from foundations, businesses, corporations and individuals made it possible to accomplish a great deal and so many things to celebrate, only some of which are below:

- We witnessed exciting progress in connecting the Refuge to our community with our new Wildlife on Wheels (WoW). Urban outreach to Title-I schools via WoW allowed us to expand our reach to provide conservation education reaching hundreds of students in just the short time it has been visiting schools. The WoW was the ONLY non-affiliated school field trip program allowed onto Lee County School District campuses during this past school year.
- We continued to provide the salary for a fulltime WoW conservation educator who is currently providing conservation education in Title-I school students in our community who are unable to make it to the Refuge.
- A key partnership with the Lee County Schools District came to fruition this year that will allow us to have a designated environmental educator from the district bring students by school bus for onsite Refuge field trips. The cost of this was split between the DDWS and the Lee County School System making it a win/win for both entities and most importantly for the students.
- The Society pays for and supports up to 12 interns each year to help the refuge accomplish its conservation efforts. This includes two fluent Spanish speaking interns as part of the WoW educational outreach program.
- We established 11 new permanently endowed funds and welcomed 3 new members to our 45/82 Society (individuals who have named the DDWS in their estate plans).

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Urban Education Leader

Melissa Maher

- We established 11 new permanently endowed funds and welcomed 3 new members to our 45/82 Society (individuals who have named the DDWS in their estate plans).
- The successful opening of the new Nature Store 2 on Periwinkle that reaches visitors to Sanibel who sometimes do not venture past Tarpon Bay Road. 100% of the proceeds from all three stores (Online; Refuge store and Periwinkle store) go to support the conservation work at the Refuge.
- We continued to support the Refuge with community outreach and education. With nearly 1 million annual Refuge visitors, the DDWS supported costs associated with design and printing of maps; informational brochures; interpretive materials and so much more.
- The year welcomed our second Artist in Residence, Rachel Pierce who wowed us with her beautiful artwork as she painted with many visitors to the Refuge.
- We had renowned speakers at our lecture series and supported a virtual film series.
- Finding ways to work events into a "covid" year, we hosted our first ever Go Wild for Jeopard- "Ding" event and our virtual baby bird shower.
- The funding for a biology tech was made possible to continue research efforts with wildlife and water quality.
- The new Jim Sprankle Nature Trail announcement was made at the Lee Anne Tauck Conservation Tract and while not yet open to the public, it is a reminder what will be coming and the good that philanthropy has in making things possible.
- We continued the planning for land restoration at the Lee Anne Tauck Conservation Tract, helped support other restoration work around the complex and explored other opportunities to acquire new sensitive lands the refuge felt were important.

Protect Educate, Inspire. . . something the board of the DDWS takes seriously. We are now in the process of refining and updating both our short and long term strategic plans. As the stewards of your generous support, it is our responsibility to ensure that the plans, processes and financial resources of the DDWS will be realistic and healthy in order to fulfill our commitment to supporting the conservation work at the Refuge and beyond.

Next year we plan on celebrating our first 40 years with "Soar for 40 More." Thank you for your support and for making a difference for wildlife and land conservation at the JN "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

More than ever, we are grateful for the sense of peace nature brings to our lives and for the amazing support of our "Ding" family of supporters. I look forward to another successful year in 2022.

With a grateful heart,

Sarah Ashton

Sarah Ashton, President

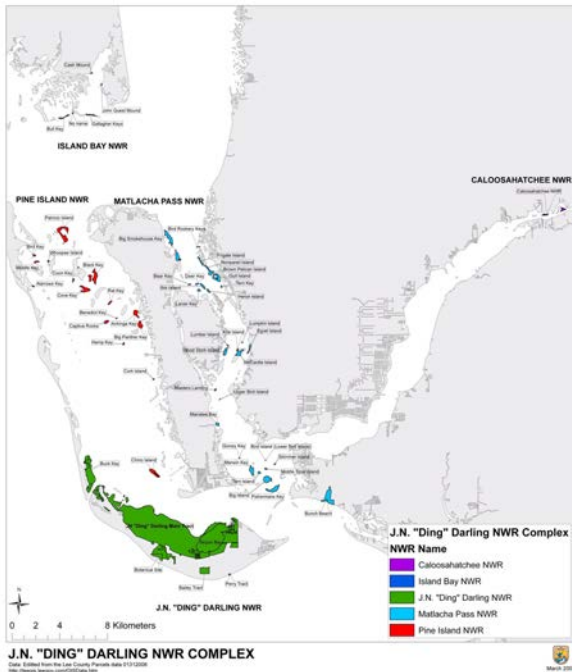
"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society



J.N. "DING" DARLING NWR COMPLEX

The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge is managed as part of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex. A National Wildlife Refuge Complex is an administrative grouping of two or more refuges, wildlife management areas, or other refuge conservation areas managed from a central office.

The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex also includes the Caloosahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Matlacha Pass National Wildlife Refuge, Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge, and Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge. These lands are primarily mangrove islands, many of which are nesting and roosting areas for wading birds and other water birds. The entire complex includes approximately 8,000 acres.

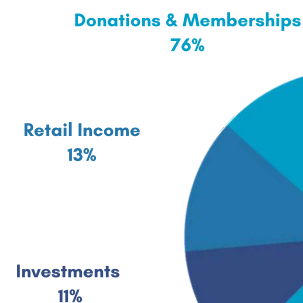


2020-2021 Revenue & Expenditures

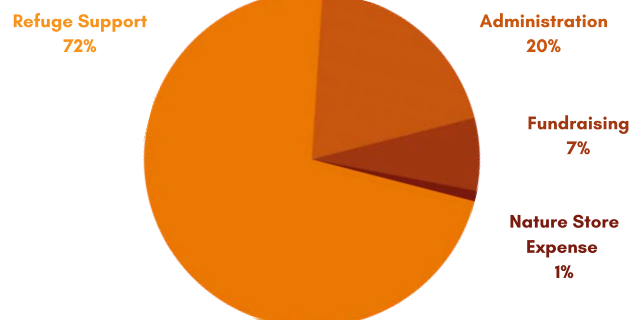
Government funding does not cover all that is necessary to manage a refuge the size of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex. As a result, wildlife refuges depend on "Friends" groups such as the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS) to fill in the gaps, providing financial and volunteer support. In 2020-2021, total philanthropic support and other income sources to the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society totaled \$6,106,135.

A total of 72% of DDWS expenditures went directly to helping the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex in the areas of conservation, wildlife protection, research, education, land acquisition and restoration. Refuge support also includes items such as exhibits, solar panels, student busing, equipment, interpretive signage, walkways, construction projects, internships, and water research and wildlife and biology research.

Revenue



Expenditures



Wildlife Research

Water Quality Research - Through philanthropic support, the Society purchased water quality monitoring equipment which allows the Refuge to document changes in our waters. Water management from Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee River greatly impact the Refuge complex and require monitoring in order to better understand how lake releases impact water quality within the refuge boundaries.

Other Wildlife Research - Throughout the year, the DDWS supported various research projects to benefit wildlife at the refuge. To expand upon our efforts, we are also supporting the first year salary of the newly created USFWS Biological Technician role currently held by Avery Renshaw.



Advocacy

Our advocacy committee continues to attend meetings virtually and in-person as they work to inform the public and our elected officials on important issues. The DDWS also invests in advocacy software to strengthen our outreach to elected officials in Washington and beyond.

Land Acquisition & Restoration

The DDWS fulfills its commitment to exploring additional land acquisition and restoration opportunities in partnership with the Refuge, other non-profits, and organizations. For instance, after acquiring the Lee Anne Tauck Conservation Tract in 2019, we received a grant this fiscal year from the State of Florida for invasive plant management on the land and unveiled the future site of the Jim Sprankle Nature Trail.



Endowed Funds

An endowment is an investment to the mission of the conservation efforts of protecting land and wildlife at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. A minimum gift of \$10,000 can establish an endowment that will leave a legacy and make future sustainability possible. Investing in establishing an endowment shows that you are dedicated to the long term support of the Refuge. The following is a list of current endowed funds supporting conservation efforts at the Refuge:

- Ann Darling & Lee Williams Jr. Family Education Fund *
- The Betty Bishop Education Fund
- Christine Glancy Education Fund *
- David A. Drachman Education Fund
- Dr. Elizabeth "Betty" Gazda-Smith Fund *
- Harkey Family Fund
- Dr. Louise Merrimon Perry Conservation (LMP, Fund for Girls) *
- Elaine Jacobson Education Fund
- Frank and Joanne Hicks Memorial Fund *
- Win & Marilyn Kloosterman Scholarship Fund
- Polly and Doug Talbott Conservation Fund *
- Marilyn Kloosterman Education Fund
- William & Helen Kronmueller Education Fund *
- Dr. Robert G. Meeker Conservation Fund
- Jane Werner Environmental Scholarship Fund
- Dr. H. Randall Deming Scholarship for Conservation & Environmental Studies Fund
- Margaret A. Godsea Conservation Fund *
- John E. Carney Education Fund *
- Gardner Family Fund
- Wild for "Ding" Conservation Fund

Philanthropy Made a Difference

As life moves forward, so does "Ding." During these continued unprecedented times, DDWS worked hard to ensure continued and consistent support of the refuge. Although these efforts looked different during this trying time, our team, in collaboration with the Refuge, pulled off many creative initiatives to continue spreading the wonder of "Ding" Darling and the importance of conservation, while keeping the Refuge safe and accessible for everyone.



In the spirit of creativity and accessibility, DDWS reinvented the ninth annual Go Wild for "Ding" fundraiser in an original virtual format.



Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) was launched to spread the Refuge message to those who are unable to visit "Ding" Darling on their own and to schools too far away to bring here by bus.



"Ding" Darling unveiled the Refuge System's first viewing scope for color blind visitors. Media, color-blind testers, and the general public were on hand for the scope's reveal on the observation tower along Wildlife Drive.



"Ding" Darling debuted its new Plant ID on the Go Virtual vegetation trail at Wildlife Drive, Indigo Trail, and Bailey Tract.



DDWS Launched the offsite-Nature Store2. Providing a storefront for selling gifts, books, clothing, art, and more to support the Refuge.

New at the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society



Rachel Pierce is the 2021 featured artist for "Ding's" second official Artist in Residence program. Pierce participated in events that introduced the public to the powerful intersection of nature and the arts.



In October 2020, Melissa Maher joined our team as our Urban Education Leader to enhance the Refuge's educational outreach programming with projects such as WoW.

Diversity & Inclusion

In an effort to be more inclusive and welcoming to all, DDWS has taken a number of steps to promote a greater sense of diversity within the "Ding" community.



Some of these actions include:

- Use of the Wildlife on Wheels mobile classroom which travels to and provides environmental education within urban and underserved communities.
- In addition to increased accessibility, we have added two bilingual WoW interns who facilitate communication in outreach experiences.
- Regular Martes Mamífero posts on social media.
- Staff, intern, and board completion of Traliant Diversity training course.
- Continued adherence to DDWS's goal of diversity and inclusion at the Refuge
- Expanded our USFWS urban initiative by partnering with Tice Elementary and the surrounding community



In April 2021, we welcomed Joy Robertson as our new Business Office Manager to oversee financial operational systems and policies in support of the DDWS mission.



DDWS partnered with Lee County Schools to co-fund the environmental education resource teacher position.

In this role, John Bailey leads experiential field trips to the Refuge.



Education & Outreach

Inspiring the next generation to be environmental stewards is integral to the DDWS mission, and we've taken large strides to reach wider audiences than ever before.



At the Refuge, we adopted the USFWS Urban standards of excellence to ensure that our messaging is safe, inclusive, and collaborative for all.

Over the course of the last year, we provided meaningful virtual learning experiences and onsite school visits while following all safety precautions. DDWS continues to forge new partnerships with the Lee County School District and more to bring other field trips back to "Ding" and more.



Wildlife on Wheels

After debuting on December 12, 2020, the Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) mobile classroom provided environmental education programs to thousands of students at Title 1 Schools in the Lee County School District.

In 3 months alone, WoW provided programming to over 5,600 students during the school year and met with over 300 students at summer camps. WoW was the only approved in-school programming during this time.

Volunteers

327
volunteers

23,654
hours
worked

over
\$640,000
saved in
labor
costs

With nearly 8,000 acres to manage in the Refuge Complex and approximately 1 million annual visitors from around the world, volunteers are vital to helping the Refuge staff achieve their conservation work. Volunteers help in many ways at "Ding;" serving as front desk ambassadors, helping in the Refuge Nature Store, assisting administration and maintenance staff, running education programs, serving as rovers on Wildlife Drive, and so much more. The DDWS supports the volunteer program by helping to cover expenses for this crucial initiative.

Due to the months-long closure of the Visitor's Center, volunteer opportunities were limited. However, we are incredibly fortunate to have volunteers who remained helpful through this time. To celebrate their efforts, we partnered with the Refuge to host a drive-through volunteer appreciation event in April.



Internship Program

With a 50% decrease in Refuge staff, the DDWS continues each year in helping the Refuge with the shortages by hiring interns to assist Visitor Services, Biology,

Education, as well as in the non-profit sector. In 2020/2021, DDWS supported fourteen interns, at the cost of \$12,500 per intern. Four of the fourteen were underwritten by individual donors, including The 2021-2022 Birmingham Internship and the Suzanne M. Dubuc Education Internship. This opportunity allows Interns to gain invaluable skills and knowledge while working at the Refuge.

The internship program provides opportunities for recent college graduates to learn hands-on about the environment and Refuge operations, creating our next generation of conservation stewards.



Nature Store

Due to government regulations, the Nature Store was closed for 8 months before reopening to the public in late November 2020. While the closing of the Nature Store resulted in a significant loss of revenue for the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, it allowed us to find new and innovative ways to provide a fun and safe shopping experience, including:



- Nature Store2 Launched at 2250 Periwinkle Way, to provide an additional storefront while the flagship location was closed due to Government restrictions. The location remains a fun, vibrant, easily accessible shop found in the heart of Sanibel.
- Shopdingdarling.com- Shortly before Covid-19, The Nature Store debuted an online sales platform at Shopdingdarling.com. This adaptation offered contactless pickup as well as online exclusive deals. It has been largely successful, helping to mitigate some of the lost revenue during the pandemic.
- **100% of Nature Store profits go directly to supporting the Refuge**



Events



In response to the ever changing health requirements of this past year, the DDWS staff used creative solutions to reimagine 2020-2021 events. We were able to host a variety of successful programs that were simultaneously safe and enjoyable for all. More than \$200,000 was raised for all events. Thank you to our sponsors whose essential contributions make these cherished events possible.

- **Go Wild for Jeopardy-Ding** – This year, our Go Wild event took on a digital format and was inspired by the beloved show "Jeopardy." This event educated its viewers on topics surrounding the Refuge, its wildlife, the island of Sanibel, and so much more. Tickets were sold for the filmed special that featured cast and crew composed of popular figures in the community.
- **"Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's 9th Annual Tarpon Tournament** – After being postponed in 2020, this year's tournament was welcomed back with open arms. Anglers from all across the country were excited to have their chance at landing the silver king and supporting a cause that is near and dear to everyone's hearts.



Lecture Series

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society hosted five lectures that featured prominent speakers such as Photographers Clyde & Niki Butcher, Author Jack Davis, and Author Paul Bannick. To follow public health guidelines of the time, each lecture was held at the Sanibel Community House where precautions such as temperature checks and social distancing ensured the safety of speakers and audience members. Between 500-600 people attended lectures over the course of the series.



Film Series

In response to public health guidelines, we moved the 2021 annual film series online for the first time ever. The virtual series featured four films that explored topics like endangered species and food waste. After each film, staff led meaningful discussions on Zoom about the important topics. This new format increased interactivity and accessibility to the series, and we had more attendees compared to any in-person film screenings from years past.



Contests

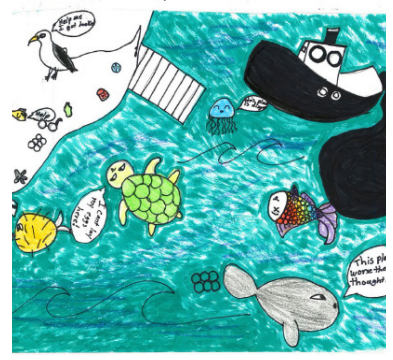
- Amateur Photo Contest- Now in it's 28th year, this annual contest is open to any amateur photographer. First place in 2020 went to Ellen Trevor for her photo of a Great Egret titled "Carry Out Lunch."
- Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest- The 9th annual contest, funded by the family of the late Theodore Cross, runs October-January and is open to all high school students in Lee, Charlotte, Collier, Glades, and Hendry counties, regardless of skill level. In 2021 first place went to Rheannon Hill for her photo titled "Flowers."
- Cartoon Contest- This contest which is open to 5th-8th graders from six Lee County schools has been running for more than 25 years. This year's winner was Eden Fautz from The Sanibel School for her cartoon on marine pollution.



Photo by: Ellen Trevor



Photo by: Rheannon Hill



Art by: Eden Fautz

Special Funding Projects

- 2020 "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society Environmental Scholarship Awards- The goal of this program is to encourage students to pursue a higher education degree in environmental studies or a related field. In 2020 there were 11 award recipients totaling \$20,700 in funds received.
- Environmental Education Grants- Every year the DDWS awards grants to teachers and educators in order to take on environmental education projects. This year we reimagined the annual funding opportunity. In 2020, DDWS awarded a total of \$15,000, split evenly, to the Lee County School District, PACE Center for Girls, and Quality Life Center to aid in any programmatic needs.
- First Permanently Endowed Internship Fund - Sanibel residents Laurie and Bill Harkey recently set up the Harkey Development & Communications Intern Fund with the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society Friends of the Refuge. The first permanently endowed internship fund at the refuge, it will guarantee ongoing funding for one intern annually.

45/82

The 45/82 Legacy Society is made up of individuals who designate the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, supporting the Refuge, as a beneficiary in your estate plans. This past year the 45/82 Society gained several new members.





Thank you for Supporting the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society

"Land, water and vegetation are just that dependent on one another. Without these three primary elements in natural balance, we can have neither fish nor game, wild flowers nor trees, labor nor capital, nor sustaining habitat for humans."

– Jay Norwood Darling



Get in touch:

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dingdarlingsociety.org