



SPRING 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.

'DING' DARLING DAY CONSERVATION CARNIVAL

To further its mission to reach and connect with underserved urban communities, the Refuge migrates its 33rd annual "Ding" Darling Day celebration to Lakes Park in Fort Myers on Sunday, April 24 (postponed from its earlier October schedule date). This year, "Ding" Day will also observe Earth Day, which falls on April 22.

The Refuge and DDWS have been keeping in sync with the Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership, a National Refuge System-wide initiative to encourage community connection. The WoW (Wildlife on Wheels) project was the first big step Refuge educators took toward spreading the word about conservation beyond Refuge borders. Since

continued on page 10

DDWS Year of the Anhinga Soars



DDWS closed on an 8.5 acre addition to the Refuge.

October 6 marks 40 years of supporting Refuge education and conservation for the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, and we have been celebrating the milestone in ways impactful and meaningful. This photo album of achievements touches on a season filled with memorable occasions. See inside for more details on the grand season of 2022.

Watch dingdarlingsociety.org events to learn as more

plans unfold for the 40th anniversary celebration and to learn how to support needs for land acquisition, habitat restoration, education, and biology staffing. Many thanks to 40th Anniversary Committee Chairs Terry Baldwin and Dick Levinson, who will be leading October's celebration. Stay tuned for details.

More photos on page 11



The ribbon-cutting for the Mindfulness Trail kicked off Wellness Week in February.



WoW tours, guided hikes, carnival games, and other family activities will introduce the greater community to the Refuge on "Ding" Darling Day, April 24.

INSIDE: 8.5-ACRE ACQUISITION • WELLNESS WEEK • 'DING' IS HOME



Bikes for Tice

The Refuge and DDWS recently awarded 25 bicycles to students of Tice Elementary School who “jumped the bucket” (aka increased academic scores by one or more levels) in science, math, and language arts between August and December 2021. All students with improved scores

were entered into a drawing for 25 bikes donated, along with helmets and bike locks, by DDWS and other partners.

“Hats off to Tice Elementary students for an impressive show of improvement!” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger, who led the Bikes for Academic Achievement program at the Refuge, part of its Urban Outreach initiative. “Hats off, also, to the amazing leadership at Tice Elementary and to the Refuge WoW team, whose visits

school administration credits for sparking students’ love of learning. And last, but nowhere least, thank you to all of the donors who supported DDWS’ fundraising drive specially earmarked for this program.”

The Refuge and Tice Elementary presented the bikes on January 27. DDWS provided Southern SnoBalls snow cones for the entire student body to encourage students and reward them for their hard work.



WILDLIFE SPOTLIGHT

Springtime brings pollinators to the thistle blooms at Bailey Tract. Thank you to Rebecca Clemens for this capture of a Tantalus Sphinx Moth and other pollinators.

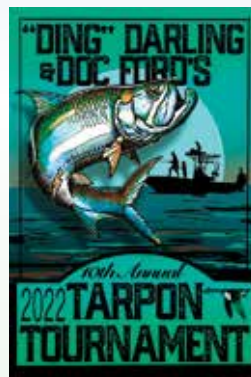
DID YOU KNOW?

Sphinx Moths have a relatively long lifespan of 10 to 30 days

Tarpon Tourney Celebrates 10 Years

The 10th annual “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament takes place May 13, and although the tournament is sold out, teams can add their names to the waiting list by contacting April Boehnen at aprilb@dingdarling-society.org or 239-472-1100 ext. 4. Fee for a team of four is \$1,000.

In the past nine years of its existence, the tourney has raised \$755,000 to support education, wildlife research, and conservation efforts at the Refuge. Support comes entirely from generous sponsors, many of whom have been sponsoring since the first year, and the Captain’s Dinner



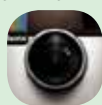
silent auction and other donations. See newsletter insert for a list of this year’s sponsors.

“As we celebrate a decade of support through responsible fishing competition, we extend a huge thanks to all who have helped expand our education mission for the Refuge,” said DDWS Executive Director and tournament organizer Birgie Miller. “Doc Ford’s has been a tremendous partner through the years, so generous in helping us meet and surpass our goals.

Thanks also to all of our sponsors, auction donors, and incredible tourney participants.”

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 18,100-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.”



Doc Ford’s Rum Bar & Grille title-sponsors the tournament for the tenth year running.

Wellness Week & the New Mindfulness Trail

As the kickoff to its Wellness Week: Mind. Body. Heart., the Refuge unveiled a new, self-guided Mindfulness Trail with a Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting. A holistic nature experience, the Mindfulness Trail features five stations with QR codes that connect hikers to podcasts with guided meditations on nature and wellbeing. The 0.35-mile trail circles Ani Marsh at Bailey Tract and is the first nature mindfulness experience to debut among the nearly 570 U.S. national wildlife refuges.

The podcasts start with an introduction to the Health Benefits of Nature by Dr. Joe Blanda, a recently retired orthopedic surgeon who promoted mindfulness and nature exposure to his recovering patients. He continues to help people with wellbeing and connectivity outdoors. Four other calming podcasts guide trail-users on the topics of grounding and mindful listening, viewing, and feeling. Each podcast runs about four minutes, easily available through smartphone technology.

"The Refuge was excited to debut the Mindfulness Trail, which has evolved from an activity the Refuge began in 2020 in response to the impact the pandemic was having on people's mental state and on Refuge programming," said Jessica Barry, DDWS Development and Outreach Assistant, who worked on the project with the Refuge.

"We are grateful to Jess for bringing us the idea of a Mindfulness Trail and all the others who encouraged us to enhance the work at the Refuge in the area of true mindfulness in nature," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, project leader. "It has resulted in the Refuge's wonderful Bailey Tract trail so hikers can self-guide their mindful journey."

"We applaud the 'Ding' Darling team for this timely innovation," said John Lai, Chamber President and CEO. "Right now, we could all use a little calming effect from nature in our lives, and leave it to the Refuge to realize that."

Wellness Week celebrated DDWS' 40th anniversary February 7-12 with activities encouraging connectivity with and healing through nature. Highlights of the week included ranger-led biking and hiking tours, sunrise yoga at the beach, guest expert speakers on the benefits of nature, discounts on paddling tours at Tarpon Bay Explorers, Refuge Bootcamp, and guided mindfulness walks.



Four podcast signs take visitors on a self-guided, mindful meditation tour.



Sunrise beach yoga and Refuge Bootcamp engaged participants in nature wellness.

Go Wild Reveal: 'Ding' Is Home

So many find their first love and second home at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. We hear it over and over again, and it inspired DDWS to create our new initiative and a video titled "Ding" Is Home, which we revealed at Go Wild for "Ding" – The

Year of the Anhinga, Soar for 40 More on February 9.

The nearly 200 gathered supporters learned that evening about our new mission to widen our embrace and stoke the home fires for a greater community through contributions from our generous donors. It began with

our ongoing education programs and strengthened last year with the launching of WoW (Wildlife on Wheels) mobile classroom, a potent symbol of our commitment to introducing the Refuge and making it more approachable regionwide.

Our goal is to bring more and diverse individuals into the "Ding" fold through community outreach, inclusive engagement on and off-island, and new programming that will include topnotch speakers, musicians, and other artists in the field of conservation. Your donation to the "Ding" Is Home Fund will help. Learn more at DingIsHome.com. Thank you for making "Ding" home to all.



DID YOU KNOW?

DDWS' logo bird, the Anhinga has nicknames referring to physical features: water turkey for its long tail and snake bird because of the shape of its neck.



DDWS 8.5-acre Acquisition

After more than six years in the making, DDWS closed on an 8.5-acre land addition to the Refuge in January. The DDWS Board of Directors, under the leadership of Past President and Emeritus Board Member John McCabe, began work on the acquisition in 2014 upon initial conversations with property owner John Boone.

"So much has happened between that time and now, but the end result is that another piece of important Sanibel land is being protected, which the Refuge will work with DDWS in restoring and managing," said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. "It's hard to believe this purchase finally happened, but it is testament to the power of conservation-minded people and the difference their support can make."

Late last year, DDWS put out an urgent plea to raise additional funds for the purchase after steeply rising property values and costs put the property out of the reach of funds already collected for the acquisition. With an end-of-January deadline, DDWS achieved the additional \$550,000 shortfall within weeks of the November 2021 call for donations. Island residents Don and Joan Sherman supported the effort with matching donations for both the acquisition and future restoration.

Adjacent to current Refuge property, the land holds a 6-acre lake that directly feeds into fragile Tarpon Bay. Its preservation not only means protecting vital wildlife habitat, but also buffering Refuge water quality against the catastrophic red tide and blue-green algae events experienced in the past.

Some of the documented listed species on the property include Gopher Tortoise, Little Blue Heron, and Mangrove Cuckoo. In addition, Small-toothed Sawfish, juvenile Tarpon, baby sea turtles, and West Indian Manatees have been using the lake, along with Bobcats and migratory birds.

"It was such critical habitat that even with the increased value and purchase price, we believed it was crucial to protect," said Birgie. "We are extremely grateful to our generous donors and hardworking board, all of whom brought this effort to fruition."

DDWS will own and manage an existing home on the property, while the Refuge manages the surrounding land and lake for conservation purposes. To support the restoration and management of the parcel, contact Birgie at director@dingdarlingsociety.org or 239-292-0566.

DID YOU KNOW?



The elusive Mangrove Cuckoo is a medium-sized bird, reaching typical sizes of one foot long with a wingspan of 17 inches. Completely silent except during breeding season, it can be difficult to detect and counts as a rare life-list sighting.



The Refuge and DDWS will work together to restore the habitat and resources on the new parcel.



Urban Education Leader Melissa Mabers with students from Villas Elementary, Fort Myers, loving their water bottles

WoW Report

Wow (Wildlife on Wheels) mobile classroom is off to a stellar start in 2022. Already in January and February, the WoW team has visited three schools from 10 days to three weeks each, reaching more than 2,300 students. Each student gets a lesson in plastic reduction with a free reusable water bottle funded by DDWS. To date, the team has distributed over 5,000 bottles to students. But there's more to the story than numbers. WoW has changed lives. Teachers tell us so. Students show us, too.

Look for the WoW nature experience at "Ding" Darling Days Conservation Carnival on Sunday, April 24, at Lakes Park in Fort Myers.

Local School 'Pocket Refuges'

This year's Environmental Education Grant program has created "Pocket Refuges" at eight Lee County district schools to teach students about the importance of pollinators and the habitat that sustains them. Working with Lee County District Environmental Education Resource Teacher Susan Hassett, DDWS has distributed \$1,500 to each of the schools to buy supplies for native pollinator gardens from a menu of indigenous plants, bird houses, trail cameras, solar-powered fountains, and other enhancements. Schools submitted proposals for creating their gardens and maintaining them for two years.

"Besides teaching kids the importance of pollinators, the Pocket Refuges are being used as mini field trips outside the classroom, where teachers can address different class subjects in an experiential way," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who helped coordinate the project.



'Ding' Darling Theodore Cross Photo Contest

Following a contest judging at the Refuge on February 25, DDWS announced winners and honorable mentions in the ninth annual "Ding" Darling-Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest. Due to COVID protocols, DDWS will not be holding an award ceremony this year; winners received their prizes by mail.

Sponsored by the Theodore Cross Family Charitable Foundation, the competition invited high school students from Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, and Hendry counties to compete for prizes that included a digital SLR camera package, chartered class trips to the Refuge, Tarpon Bay Explorers excursions, and copies of *Waterbirds: Portraits and Anecdotes from Birding Adventures* by contest namesake, the late Theodore Cross.

Cross, who lived part-time on Sanibel Island, marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; advised the Johnson and Nixon administrations on anti-poverty programs; wrote the influential book *Black Capitalism*, among others; and created Birders United, a birding Web site that ranked legislators according to their record of bird protection support.

Late in life, Cross decided to indulge his love for birds and photography and traveled the world to collect stunning portraits and stories to chronicle his adventures. He photographed often at "Ding" Darling, and a number of the images in his book reflect his love for the Refuge. Cross published *Waterbirds* in 2009 at age 85; he passed away shortly after that in February 2010.

Judges reviewed 270 images taken by students from 12 different schools. Three teachers of students who submitted photos from schools in need received a digi-



Above: "Frog in the Shade" by Ryan Mitchinson took second place. Right: In third place was Claire Henry's "Peeking Lizard."

tal SLR camera as a result of a donation made to DDWS specifically for that purpose.

"Being able to put on this contest with so many passionate and creative young photographers is so exciting," said DDWS Associate Executive Director Sierra Hoisington, who coordinates the contest. "Their different perspectives and ability to find the beauty in anything is so special. Their choice of subject matter may seem unique to us, but I believe their outlook on life is something we could all learn from."

"Theodore Cross' family made this contest possible, and it has become a solid success story," said Birgie Miller, DDWS executive director. "We couldn't be more thrilled that the family wants its donations used in this way — to reach an age group that often falls through the cracks of conservation education. Kudos to Sierra Hoisington and our staff for a fabulous job of running the contest."



"We are so happy to be supporting a contest in my father's name, a contest that will get our youth involved with nature by looking at it — as my father so loved doing — through a camera lens," said Amanda Cross.

Students were able to submit up to two photographs. To view winning and honorable mention images online and for information on the 2023 photo contest, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests.



Nature portraits by New York artist Lori Lawrence are on display through April.

2022 Art Exhibitions at the Refuge

Art exhibitions have returned to the auditorium in the "Ding" Darling Visitor & Education Center. They include occasional personal appearances by the artists, so watch "Ding" on the Wing for details. Below is the schedule of upcoming exhibitions.

Lori Lawrence Art Exhibition — March 1 — April 30, 2022
 Jim Bennight Photography Exhibition - May 1-June 30, 2022
 2022 Artist in Residence Jacqui Roche Exhibition - September 1 to October 31, 2022
 Niki Butcher Art Exhibition - November 15-December 31, 2022 (sponsored by Wayne & Linda Boyd)

MEMORIAL AND HONOR GIFTS

December 15, 2021 – February 28, 2021

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:

Kathleen Alvarez	Mary Ellen “Jill” Herres
Nancy Day Ankenman	Charles John Horvath
Richard Bailey	Maria & Hartley Howard
David J. Baues	Mom & Aunt Janet
Martha Blom	Ken Johnson
Elizabeth “Betty” Cannon	Gordon & Cecil McLelland
John E. Carney	Robert G. Meeker
Jeffrey Case	Gianni Migliorini
Rosalie Courter	Hermie Miller
Theodore Cross	Bill Pettibone
Debbie Cutchin & Paulette Pitrak	Linda Powers
Edith Thatcher DeBurlo	Bill Rankin
Carolyn Decoster	Nancy E. Raphael
H. Randall Deming	Berry G. Richards
Rhoda Dorsey	Phyllis Jean Russell
Dr. David Drachman	Bud & Martha Ryckman
Suzanne Dubuc	Harry Sabiers
Milly Ellis	John Salladino
Gerald Fondessy	Mary Lou Schadt
Carol Fowler	Birgit Segerdahl
Betty Gazda-Smith	Stanley L. Smith
Wayne Reid Goforth	Irene A. Stoesser
Stanley Goldman	Polly and Doug Talbott
Arthur & Constance Goodman	Charles Trainor
Gertrude Grant	McKayla Ann Wall
	D. Reid Weedon, Jr.

We recently received gifts in **HONOR** of the following:

Anne & Patrick Aubourg	Susan Lloyd
Patricia Barrett	Cindy Lueder
Joyce Barney & Kim Milling	John MacLennan
Sarah Pullins & Matthew Blume	Helen Minkes
April Boehnen	Gordon O’Brien
Chuck & Barbara Bryden	Frank Perpich
Kristie Lynn Burns	Rick & Jane Ranieri
Joe Caruso	Scott Rogers
Tom Busby & Ann Corso	Richard & Barbara Russell
Jane Deseforges	Patty & Jim Sprinkle
Mary Geib	Joe Stack
Mary Guillet	Ruth Thurston
Amanda Hockensmith	Toni Westland
James E. Kenney	Donna & Steve Yetko
Alan & Carol Landholt	Stan Zagajski

Endowment Funds

An endowment is an investment in the Refuge’s conservation mission to protect land and wildlife. Your gift of \$10,000 or more can establish an endowment that will leave a legacy and make future sustainability possible. Investing in an endowment shows you are dedicated to long-term Refuge support. The following current endowed funds support conservation efforts at the Refuge:

- The Betty Bishop Education Fund
- John E. Carney Education Fund
- The Ann Darling & Lee Williams, Jr., Family Education Fund
- Carolyn & Donald DeCoster Conservation Fund
- Dr. H. Randall Deming Scholarship for Conservation & Environmental Studies Fund
- Dr. David A. Drachman Education Fund
- Tom Edgar Volunteer Fund
- Gardner Family Fund
- Dr. Elizabeth “Betty” Gazda-Smith Fund
- Christine Glancy Education Fund
- Margaret Godsea Conservation Fund
- Harkey Development & Communications Intern Fund
- Harkey Family Fund
- Elaine Jacobson Education Fund
- Frank & Joanne Hicks Memorial Fund
- Gardner Family Fund
- Win and Marilyn Kloosterman Scholarship Fund
- Marilyn Kloosterman Education Fund
- William & Helen Kronmueller Education Fund
- Dr. Robert G. Meeker Conservation Fund



The William & Helen Kronmueller Education Fund was established by their daughters, Nancy Minster and Diane Husk, to support Refuge educational programs and to honor their late parents’ (pictured here) love of birds and the natural beauty of Southwest Florida.

- Dr. Louise Merrimon Perry Conservation Fund for Girls (LMP Fund for Girls)
- Harry and Betty Taif Fund
- Polly & Doug Talbott Conservation Fund
- Sue Tray Visitor Service Intern Fund
- Jane Werner Environmental Scholarship Fund
- Wild for “Ding” Conservation Fund

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Our Environment: Reasons for Hope and Concern

by Jim Metzler, DDWS Advocacy Committee Co-Chair

We must carefully monitor two activities that have the potential to impact the Refuge. One is the creation of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Storage Reservoir, and the other is the implementation of the Lake Okeechobee System Operations Manual (LOSOM).

The EAA reservoir is designed to hold water released from Lake O and runoff from the Caloosahatchee River estuary in the wet season, and release this water south in the dry season. One of the threats to the EAA reservoir is the need for consistent funding over the next 8 to 10 years from both the state of

Florida and federal government. Florida Senate Bill 2508 was filed early in February. This bill potentially threatened the state’s funding of the EAA, but thanks to Refuge supporters who responded to our call to action, it looks as though some of the most damaging language will be removed.

LOSOM is the newly developed manual for managing releases out of Lake Okeechobee in a way that balances the needs of all stakeholders. Unfortunately, some stakeholders want to increase the benefits they receive, even if that hurts other stakeholders. SB 2508 put pressure on the South Florida Water Management District to request changes in LOSOM, changes likely to be detrimental to the west coast of Florida.

THANK YOU TO OUR GO WILD FOR "DING" SPONSORS



It raised more than **\$300,000** raised to support Refuge conservation and education programs. Thank you to everyone who flocked together to make this event a success!

CALL OF THE WILD SPONSORS



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PROTECTOR SPONSORS



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THANK YOU TO OUR 2022 "DING" DARLING LECTURE SERIES SPONSORS



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David Allen Sibley Lecture Co-Sponsors



Jack Davis Lecture Co-Sponsors



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Trophy Case of Fort Myers



Jeff & Tom Kordell



SILVER SPONSORS



Hail to the Harkeys

Sanibel residents Laurie and Bill Harkey recently made generous contributions of \$1 million each to DDWS and CROW (Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife).

"Laurie and I have always been fans of the outdoors and wildlife, and this is a way to support public education and environmental and wildlife protection while we are still around to see the results," said Bill Harkey.

Having visited Sanibel since 2002, the Harkeys were hooked on the beauty and conservation ethic of the island. They became homeowners and moved to Sanibel permanently in 2019 and immediately began volunteering their time and resources at CROW, the Refuge, DDWS, and other island organizations.

"We both came from community-minded families, and we were raised to believe in giving back, whether in time, money, or in-kind donations," said Laurie. "Several generations of both our families instilled this philosophy of community responsibility in their children. We are grateful that we are able to support our local nonprofit organizations, and it's gratifying to see the results of our good fortune."

"I can't say enough about the generosity of the Harkeys," said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. "Bill serves on our Board of Directors, and they both volunteer and constantly step up to sponsor events and support our programming. This overwhelming show of generosity



CROW's Alison Hussey, donors Bill and Laurie Harkey, and DDWS' Birgie Miller

represents a combination of permanent endowment support, capital and land support, as well as some annual unrestricted support for the Refuge. We couldn't be more delighted and grateful for the help with DDWS' support of the Refuge's conservation and education mission."

The Harkeys say they hope to inspire others to follow their lead in giving where and when the funds make the most difference and allow them to enjoy seeing their dollars making that difference.

"After consulting with our financial advisor, we decided to make these donations at this time rather than including them in our estate plans," said Bill. "We realized we could do this without any negative impact on our standard of living or our lifestyle, and at the same time we would be able to see the positive impact of our donations. While it is a wonderful thing to remember these organizations in your estate planning, nonprofits also need funds now. Why wait until you're gone to make an impact?"

UPCOMING EVENTS

2022 Virtual Film Series – Through April 13, 2022

Free Refuge Programs – Through April 16, 2022

Lori Lawrence Art Exhibition – Through April 30, 2022

"Ding" Darling Day Conservation Carnival @ Lakes Park – April 24, 2022

Jim Bennight Photography Exhibition - May 1-June 30, 2022

10th Annual "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament – May 13, 2022

Artist in Residence Exhibition - September 1-October 31, 2022

Niki Butcher Art Exhibition – November 15-December 31, 2022 (sponsored by Wayne & Linda Boyd)

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.



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design on tote bags,
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STAFF NEWS

New DDWS Associate Executive Director

DDWS has promoted Sierra Hoisington from Development Officer to Associate Executive Director. Sierra began working for DDWS in 2016; she fills a position vacated by Lynnae Messina at the end of 2021.



"It was important for me to find a replacement with the knowledge, maturity, and experience to take on the role," said Birgie Miller, DDWS Executive Director. "The first thing I did was look within our current team and realized I had the right person for this role."

Originally from Tega Cay, South Carolina, Sierra graduated from Clemson University in South Carolina with a bachelor's degree in wildlife and fisheries biology. She assisted Clemson as a wildlife technician on bat research in the Nantahala National Forest. Before arriving to "Ding," she worked for the National Wildlife Refuge Association at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in Georgia.

As part of the DDWS staff, Sierra took charge of photography contests, lecture and film series, and special exhibitions. With Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, she led

the recent project to build and develop the WoW (Wildlife on Wheels) mobile classroom.

During her tenure with DDWS, Sierra has completed courses at the Indiana University Fund Raising School of Philanthropy, the Kellogg School of Business in Illinois, the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, and several courses at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), a U.S. Fish & Wildlife (USFWS) facility in West Virginia.

"Ding" has been my home for nearly six years now, and I couldn't imagine working with a more supportive, creative, and altruistic group of people," Sierra said. "The work we are doing here at the Refuge and in our communities off the island ensures everyone gets a chance to be a part of the conservation conversation. I'm excited to help continue this important work."

"Sierra's time with DDWS has given her the ability to understand the nuances of working with the USFWS and abiding by the partnership agreement between the two entities," said Birgie. "Having worked with USFWS staff around the state and nation on the WoW and urban outreach initiatives, Sierra is known and respected by her government peers at 'Ding' Darling and within the overall system. She recognizes and embraces the importance of collaboration and teamwork. We are so happy she has accepted this position as my 'right-hand staffer.'"

Refuge Volunteer Coordinator

From intern to a four-year term Ranger position to now a permanent Refuge staffer, Katy Hosokawa recently accepted the title Volunteer Coordinator. She fills the position vacated by long-time Ranger Jeff Combs, who retired in fall 2020.



"We are so thrilled to have Katy in a permanent position and filling this role that is so important to Refuge operations," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. "Our volunteer corps is crucial to us. Although volunteer numbers are down somewhat because of the pandemic, we still count on volunteer hours, which are roughly the equivalent of 10 fulltime staffers currently."

A native Texan from the small town of Azle, Katy graduated from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in 2015 with a bachelor's degree in geography. She then went on to earn a master's degree from the University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, where she studied environmental geoscience. Before starting at the Refuge in June 2020, Katy held a naturalist position at the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge in Texas.

'DING' DARLING DAY

continued from page 1

December 2020, it has reached nearly 13,000 students, parents, and other adults across the region.

WoW will be at the center of the free "Ding" Darling Day. Besides tours of the mobile nature experience, the Refuge and DDWS have planned a full day of Conservation Carnival activities from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Special outdoor activities include carnival games, prizes, Earth Day crafts, artist-in-residence programs, guided bilingual birding walks, a biking tour, snow cones, and educational interactions with other local conservation organizations.

"We look forward to reinventing 'Ding' Darling Day to make that connection actually out IN the community," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who chairs the event's committee. "We're still ironing out details, but expect fun and enrichment for the entire family." Watch dingdarlingday.com for details as they unfold.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, DDWS, and Tarpon Bay Explorers cosponsor "Ding" Day with generous support from the local community and businesses. DDWS seeks sponsors for the event, which will be highly publicized throughout the Southwest Florida area. Contact April Boehnen at april@dingdarlingsociety.org or 239-472-1100 ext. 4 for more information.

A big thanks to this year's sponsors:

GREAT EGRET



GREAT BLUE HERON



REDDISH EGRET



SNOWY EGRET

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Southern SnoBalls
Tarpon Bay Explorers

DDWS YEAR OF THE ANHINGA

continued from page 1



The 40th anniversary Go Wild for "Ding" fundraiser netted more than \$300,000, including \$30,000 from the live auction of this special Jim Sprankle 40th-anniversary edition Feather Necklace.



Amy Matsumoto Urich (left), shown with parents Polly and Ikki in a family photo included in the book **Cap-tivated: The Art of Ikki Matsumoto**, spoke about her father's life and work during the 2022 Lecture Series.



"Ding" showed its urban support of the Tice community with a Biking for Academic Achievement drive.



Programs will include birding tours, bikes, Reading at the Refuge, and other family activities for the summer.

FREE SUMMER PROGRAMS

Refuge Visitor Services staff has announced plans to continue its free tours program this summer from June 12 through August 7. Staff will continue to limit the outdoor tours to 10 people or fewer.

Due to staffing uncertainties, no schedule is set for the tours. Those interested should monitor the [DingDarling.Eventbrite.com](https://dingdarling.eventbrite.com) page, where participants must pre-register free-of-charge. Tours will include a beach exploration, story-and-crafts activity, birding tour, hikes, and mindfulness walks.

"We are excited to be able to welcome visitors to our free educational tours again this summer," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. "Watch our Eventbrite site for possible additions as the summer progresses."

Free educational tours are made possible through support from the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society. For more information, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/free-refuge-programs or call 239-472-1100 ext. 221.





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HIGH SCHOOL CONTEST WINNER

First place winner in this year's "Ding" Darling-Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest went to an image titled "Fly" by Dani Mosser, a 10th-grader from Cape Coral High. "I saw a perfect opportunity to capture a close up of an insect that is not usually appreciated," the student wrote in the required paragraph accompanying the photo. "However, the photo revealed amazing textures and colors." Read more about contest winners on page 5.