

Friends of Rookery Bay year in review



2016



*Working with the local community to support environmental education,
research and stewardship for the 110,000-acre Rookery Bay Reserve*

community connections

Educating Local Families

This was a busy year for Reserve educators and volunteers. They hosted 3,250 students from local schools and universities on field trips and welcomed 24,332 visitors to the Environmental Learning Center. On-site education programs reach local families through programs like Girls in Science Slumber and Kids FREE Fridays, which provides free admission for children ages 12 and younger every Friday from June through August. This year, the summer program received support through a Community Grant from Walmart.



New Research Coordinator

This year the reserve welcomed research coordinator Dr. Brita Jessen. Brita is a coastal systems ecologist whose work has focused on the effects of cultural change on ecosystem function and services. She received a B.A. in biological sciences from Wellesley College and a Ph.D. in oceanography from the University of Rhode Island. Hailing from Lexington, Massachusetts, and Rangeley, Maine, Brita has found Rookery Bay to be a fascinating place of natural wonders and ongoing change. "I'm passionate about ecosystem science as a public service."



Engaging Visitors in Nature

The Rookery Bay estuary provides important habitat for many species of wildlife, as well as an ideal setting to learn about and explore Southwest Florida through guided boat and kayak tours.

"We thoroughly enjoyed our afternoon with our guide, Randy. He's extremely knowledgeable and a great storyteller. Randy piloted the skiff deep into a maze of mangrove islands, rich with an array of migrating and local birds. He brought us to a surprising treasure... one of the highest places in Collier County that affords the traveler expansive views of the Ten Thousand Islands. We'll be back to experience another trip with Randy." -- *LTT113 on TripAdvisor*



Boat tours accommodate a maximum of six passengers, and kayak tours include all gear and instruction. Tours are offered seasonally and are the only Rookery Bay boat tours conducted by Reserve staff. All proceeds support the Friends of Rookery Bay and Rookery Bay Research Reserve.



supporting students and the environment



Girls in Science Slumber

This new program offered by Reserve staff and volunteers invited 20 girls ages 8-14 to discover the nocturnal side of nature through an overnight adventure in the Learning Center. They spent time in the plankton lab, stargazed and experienced the “Sea Turtle Hurdles” obstacle course. Support from the Friends makes this event possible, with each child receiving snacks, games and activities, takeaways and FREE passes to visit again with their family.

Supporting Manatee Response

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) office that responds to manatees and dolphins needing assistance in southwest Florida is headquartered in Port Charlotte. Because they cover such a large territory they often rely on partners to first verify the report before responding. Greg Curry works for the Reserve and has responded to several incidents. “Some calls have turned out to be large dead fish or palm fronds,” said Greg, who has many years of experience with marine mammals and boat operation. His knowledge of local waters has been

very helpful to FWC biologists, enabling a much quicker response to manatees stranded in remote waters. In January 2016, Greg helped rescue a manatee that was showing signs of red tide stress near Isles of Capri. She was transported to Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo for rehabilitation and in April was returned to Rookery Bay waters amidst a crowd of adoring fans.

Adopt a Turtle Nest Program

Sea turtle hatching success at Cape Romano improved significantly in 2005 when Rookery Bay Reserve staff began placing cages over the nests to protect them from predators. The program has grown and now the Friends of Rookery Bay supports an intern who spends the summer protecting sea turtles. This year, the brainchild of Friends member Rita Bleasdale became a reality. The “Adopt A Nest” program was created as a way for people to help fund the internship program. Nest adoption costs \$250 and includes a personalized name tag, details of nest location with coordinates, date of expected hatching and more. Despite two significant storm events, we had more nests on Cape Romano this year than ever before (207), and a record number of hatchlings made it to the Gulf of Mexico (5,246).

Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

The Reserve protects 110,000 acres of coastal lands and waters in southwest Florida that serve as an outdoor classroom and laboratory for students and scientists from around the world. It is managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in cooperation with NOAA.

Friends of Rookery Bay fundraising support



Legacy Gift: Remembering the Norris Family

We are thrilled to recognize the generosity of the Dellora A. & Lester J. Norris Foundation for their legacy gift to the Friends of Rookery Bay in the amount of \$30,000. We spent a morning with Lavern Gaynor, local philanthropist and daughter of the Norrises, as she relived her early days spent on Keewaydin Island. Read about that visit at rookerybay.org/news/all-news.



Generating Community Support

The Friends of Rookery Bay hosted several fundraising events in 2016, including the annual Batfish Bash for the Bay, which raises awareness and funds in support of the Reserve. The “Fund-A-Need” focused on fisheries research. Research staff have been working with partners to get acoustic receivers to track fish movements along the coast. Event sponsors included Minto, Arthrex, First Florida Integrity Bank and Horizons Rentals.

The third annual Guardian Anglers fishing tournament in Reserve waters was another success. Many thanks to patrons and sponsors who helped raise nearly \$15,000 in support of fisheries research and environmental education, including Minto, who hosted our kickoff party, Hamilton Harbor Yacht Club and Florida First Integrity Bank.

The Friends of Rookery Bay, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, gratefully acknowledges the support of the following businesses and individuals who made cash contributions, gave in-kind donations, joined at the Manatee level or above, or participated in any of our live or silent auctions in 2016. Every effort was made to include all supporters. If you note an omission, please contact us: friends@rookerybay.org or 239-530-5971.

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The Friends of Rookery Bay works to support needed environmental education, research and stewardship of the 110,000-acre Rookery Bay Reserve.



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