

News Release



J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
May 8, 2007

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Refuge Restricts Use of Alligator Curve

In recent weeks yellow-crowned night herons have built and occupied several nests along Wildlife Drive on the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. There has been no shortage of people stopping, looking and taking photographs. When nesting began refuge managers built a temporary fence to create a reasonably protective buffer between viewers and the nests, and yet some visitors and photographers continue to enter the closed area behind the fencing and have gone so far as to break branches off the trees that concealed the nests to gain a better view. These actions continue to increase and disturb the birds. Two of the nests have been abandoned. Due to the increased disturbance, the refuge has restricted public use of Alligator Curve until the birds' offspring have fledged which could be as late as the middle of June.

For visitors this means there will be no stopping or parking along Alligator Curve and the closed area has been widened to protect the birds and nests. "We cannot continue to allow what has been occurring at the Alligator Curve area. Wildlife photography and wildlife observation are two of the refuge system's important and encouraged public uses, but if those uses conflict with our Wildlife First mission we are obligated to either stop or regulate the use," Refuge Manager Rob Jess said. "It is unfortunate, but this decision has been forced upon us by the portion of refuge visitors who can't seem to enjoy wildlife from an appropriate distance," Jess added.

Yellow-crowed night herons are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act which decreed that all migratory birds and their parts, including eggs, nests, and feathers are fully protected. Disturbing these birds will result in a fine. Visitors will not be allowed to park from Shell Mound Trail to the exit of Wildlife Drive. If visitors would like to know the progress of the nests they are encouraged to go to the Ding Darling Education Center to get up-to-date nesting information.

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