

Ocean Reef Generosity Aids Wild Bird Center

By Kristen Burnie
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A recent donation from an Ocean Reef Club member, coupled with an Ocean Reef Foundation grant, has helped a local refuge for wild birds to stay afloat through difficult economic times.

Since 1984, the Florida Keys Wild Bird Center, located on Key Largo's bayside, has been a healing place for injured wild birds. The center's primary objective is help wild birds recuperate before releasing them back into the wild; however, birds that are unable to recover can also find permanent refuge at the center.

Early this fall, the center fell upon an economic crisis when its monthly, donation-driven income dropped from \$35,000 in August to just \$9,200 in September and \$3,200 in the first half of October. With unceasing bird food and medicine bills, the center was on the brink of being forced to shut down. In such an event, Federal law would have required that the birds be adopted out to other shelters or euthanized.

Bruce Horn, the Center's Executive Director, said that up until last week, the outlook for the center's survival was dismal.

"We knew we wouldn't make it through October," Horn said. "We knew the wells would start running dry and we'd have to start placing as many birds as we could."

That was until Ocean Reef Club donor Bob Gintel offered to provide a matching grant of up to \$10,000 for donations made to the center through the Ocean Reef Foundation. Within days, the match had been met and a \$20,000 donation



was made.

"The Ocean Reef response to the crisis at the Bird Center is a great example of your Ocean Reef Foundation at work. When one of our concerned donors learned of this need, he offered \$10,000 from his own Donor Advised Fund held at the Foundation, if it could be matched by others," said Foundation Board Member Rich Miller. "The Foundation itself was able to quickly respond with a \$5,000 small urgent response grant from a recently created fund, which was developed to handle emergencies during this tough economic climate. Just as soon as we made some other Reef donors, who had expressed an interest in being informed of urgent needs in this area, aware of the matching offer, we had the total match and a check for \$20,000 was on its way in just a few days. A case of your Foundation and several generous Ocean Reefers 'giving where they live'."

While the donation, which will be used to pay for bird food and medications, has alleviated the immediate financial crisis, the problem has not been entirely solved. Instead, the grant has given the center time to develop a stronger operational and financial plan.

"With the generosity of Ocean Reef and Bob Gintel, I think we have enough money to get to the season and continue to operate," said former Bird Center board member Havey Zielger. "Once we get things stabilized and are not in emergency mode, we are going to restructure and move into the future on a stable basis."

Ziegler said that fundraising efforts are also being made throughout the community of Key Largo and elsewhere in the Upper Keys.

Members who would like to learn more can contact the Florida Keys Wild Bird Center at 305-852-4486 or the Ocean Reef Foundation at 305-367-4707.