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GET OUTDOORS IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

COLLIER TOURISM

It's time for shorebird nesting season, Naples Pride festival

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Guest Columnist

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Our annual seasonal resident snowbird season has come to an end but that doesn't mean the action stops in Florida's Paradise Coast of Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades. Spring and summer make up shorebird nesting season, which means it's a good time for residents and visitors to take advantage of an upcoming educational program about beach access and etiquette.

It's also time again to flock to the colorful Naples Pride festival coming up

See TOURISM, Page 6D



A Breakfast with the Birds: Amazing Lives of Beach Nesting Birds program will be held June 19 at Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. DAVE GRAFF

Tourism

Continued from Page 1D

June 2 at Cambier Park in downtown Naples.

Shorebird nesting season

Have you walked through an area that is posted as a protected shorebird nesting area because it's a shortcut to the beach?

If you're not aware this has negative impacts, you could benefit from the upcoming *Breakfast with the Birds: Amazing Lives of Beach Nesting Birds* program on June 19 at 9:30 a.m. at Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Shorebird nesting season starts in March and lasts through Aug. 31. Least terns (a threatened species) and black skimmers (a species of special concern) lay their eggs right in the sand on some Southwest Florida beaches.

A large sandbar south of Cape Romano and Marco Island that over the years has been a popular stop for boaters and shell seekers has become the largest nesting colony for least terns and black skimmers in Florida. Since being designated a Critical Wildlife Area, it is now closed to public access during nesting season. When public access returns Sept. 1 through the end of February, recreational use returns. Watch for posted signs to avoid areas where nesting is in progress.

The Rookery Bay program will provide information on what we can all do to give these birds the space they need to raise their young and general tips on safe bird watching behavior. For more information on this and other informative programs on birds and wildlife, visit rookerybay.org.

Naples Pride

The second annual Naples Pride festival happens Saturday, June 2, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Cambier Park. Naples Mayor Bill Barnett will kick off the day that is expected to be bigger and better than last year's successful inaugural festival.

The event is free to attend but a \$5 donation is requested. All funds raised stay in the community to support the Naples Pride LGBTQ Task Force Emergency Fund, which provides emergency support to those in crisis in our community.

There will be lots of live music and entertainment along with over 60 area vendors, food trucks and more.

Attendees can make a mini staycation out of that weekend by taking advantage of special Pride rates at area hotels including Naples Grande Beach Resort, DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Naples and Ramada Naples. For information on Pride rates visit paradisecoast.com/deals or contact Michelle Pirre at the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention and Visitors Bureau at michelle.pirre@colliercountyfl.gov for the latest information or assistance on booking at special group rates.

JoNell Modys is the public relations and communications manager for the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention and Visitors Bureau, the tourism marketing organization for Collier County where more than 1.7 million visitors annually provide an economic impact of over \$2 billion and support over 37,000 local jobs. Check the destination website, paradisecoast.com, for more ideas on what to see and do in Florida's Paradise Coast. Share your photos on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter using #ParadiseCoast.