ELearning 4th Grade SCIENCE DAY 2 *NOTE This assignment is 3 pages long.

Protecting Endangered Birds… with Alligators!



You may have seen **security** guards in stores or banks, but have you ever heard of security-guard alligators?

A conservation project on Sanibel Island in Florida, just northwest of the Everglades on the Gulf Coast, will let alligators protect snowy egrets and other birds that wade in shallow waters.

How will the conservationists in charge of the project do this? By building basking sites for alligators in the wetlands near a restored mangrove forest. That's right—they'll build a special beach where the alligators can enjoy the Florida sunshine.

Mangroves are tropical trees that grow in tidal areas along the coastline. They survive in water that is 100 times saltier than most other plants can tolerate. They also have complex root systems that protect nearby shores and beaches, filter pollutants from the water, provide nesting places for birds, and offer underwater protection for small fish.

A conservation group on Sanibel Island purchased 68 acres called the Wulfert Bayous, located next to the famous J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife **Refuge**. The **refuge** includes thousands of acres of mangrove forest, underwater seagrass beds, cordgrass marshes, and small islands. It provides homes to more than 245 species of birds and is world-famous for the migratory birds that pass through. One of the birds that calls the **refuge** home is the snowy egret.

Many birdwatchers are especially fond of egrets, including the beautiful snowy egret. Slightly smaller than a goose, the snowy egret has a yellow face, pure white feathers, black legs, and yellow-orange feet. Its wingspan is about three feet wide.

During their mating season, snowy egrets grow beautiful, long, wispy feathers on their backs, necks, and heads. In the late 1800s, when these feathers were used to decorate ladies' hats, the birds were hunted nearly to extinction. But then, laws were passed in the early 1900s to prevent hunting snowy egrets, and they were saved!

In the past few years, the population of snowy egrets has been **declining** again. This time, the **decline** is due to loss of **habitat**, which is the land and water where they nest and hunt for food. They also have problems with predators such as raccoons and rats, which steal their eggs, and with pollution.

The project in the Wulfert Bayous includes removing invasive plants and building a nesting island for wading birds like the snowy egret. The nesting island will include the special beach for the alligators. The alligators will eat small mammals, including the raccoons and rats that prey on some wading birds' eggs. In addition to helping the snowy egrets, the island will provide a home for other bird species that were injured during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, a disaster that sent millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.

In all, the birds will benefit from their alligator guards and new nesting island. The alligators will benefit from guarding the birds, too—with tasty raccoon dinners and nice beaches to bask on!

Comprehension Questions

1. What will alligators on Sanibel Island be protecting?

A. bald eagles and other birds that fly high in the sky
B. snowy egrets and other birds that wade in shallow water
C. barn owls and other birds that live in trees
D. wood thrushes and other birds that live in forests

2. What has caused the egret population to decline in the past few years?

A. water pollution and hurricanes
B. fires and human development
C. hunger and dehydration
D. loss of habitat and predators

3. The conservation effort in Wulfert Bayous involves several different approaches to protecting the animals and plants that live there.

Answer

What evidence from the text supports this conclusion?

A. “The project in the Wulfert Bayous includes removing invasive plants and building a nesting island for wading birds like the snowy egret.”

B. “In the late 1800s, when these feathers were used to decorate ladies’ hats, the birds were hunted nearly to extinction.”

C. “Slightly smaller than a goose, the snowy egret has a yellow face, pure white feathers, black legs, and yellow-orange feet. Its wingspan is about three feet wide.”

D. “It provides homes to more than 245 species of birds and is world-famous for the migratory birds that pass through.”

4. How might you describe the impact of the special beach for alligators on the alligators and egrets that live in the Wulfert Bayous?

Answer

A. They both benefit from the special beach.

B. The alligators are harmed by the special beach.

C. The snowy egrets are harmed by the special beach.

D. They are both harmed by the special beach.

5. What is the main idea of this text?

Answer

A. Some birds wade in shallow water, like snowy egrets, and some birds fly over the water to catch fish, but both kinds of birds achieve the same goal.

B. Alligators are dangerous animals and they shouldn’t be anywhere near birds because they could eat them or hurt them.

C. Conservationists in Florida are building a nesting island with a basking area for alligators to help protect the habitats of birds like snowy egrets.

D. The J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge is a special area in Florida where many unique plants and animals live.