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NATURE

around the outer perimeter of the lake and to replace them with Florida-friendly vegetation, ensuring it is easier to make their way around the island to observe all the bird activity from every angle.

Nesting months typically begin in December and continue into May each year. During this busy season, guests may have the opportunity to witness Anhingas, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Cattle Egrets, Glossy Ibises, Green Herons, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets and Tricolored Herons as they build or enhance their nests, court potential mates, incubate eggs and raise chicks. While more species can be observed during the nesting season, visiting throughout the rest of the year is still rewarding since the Rookery has year-round avian visitors. Nesting species and others such as White Ibises and Little Blue Herons flock in great numbers to the island each evening at sunset to roost safely for the night, when alligators patrol the lake, keeping mammalian predators from preying on the island's birds.

Since the Rookery is an all-volunteer project, the VAAS advises that volunteers to help staff the Rookery are always appreciated and asks that guests consider supporting this special community treasure by making a contribution during their visits. For convenience, a secure donation box that is monitored frequently is on site. According to the VAAS website, all contributions support the organization's work, including its award-winning elementary bird study education program that brings Sarasota County second-graders to the Rookery each year.

The next time you want to get away from it all and appreciate the beauty of nature, remember this community gem is just a short drive away, making it an ideal afternoon's excursion.

For more information about this article, contact the Venice Area Audubon Society at 941.496.8984 or email info@veniceaudubon.org. Located along Annex Road behind the Anderson Sarasota County Administration Center, the Venice Area Audubon Rookery is open from dawn to dusk every day of the year.

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