



# The Ghost Writer

JANUARY, 2010

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, "Home of the Ghost Orchid"

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday  
4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday

starting November 14 through April  
Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child  
**Reservations Required.**  
Phone (239) 695-1023 or email  
[islandgirlm@msn.com](mailto:islandgirlm@msn.com)

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

1<sup>st</sup> Saturday

Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child  
**Reservations Required.**  
Phone (239) 695-1023 or email  
[islandgirlm@msn.com](mailto:islandgirlm@msn.com)

### VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday

If you can help, phone (239) 695-1023.

### BOARD MEETING

Sunday, January 10, 10:00 a.m.  
Port of the Islands

### DISCOVERY SERIES

#### COASTAL CRUISE

Sunday, January 31, 2:30 p.m.

National Park, Everglades City

#### The SAFARI

Saturday, February 27, 1:00 p.m.

Janes Scenic Drive, Copeland  
See page 4

### AMAZING ADVENTURES

"Kayaking the Mississippi"

Tommy Owen & Charles Vaught

Friday, January 8, 6:30 p.m.

See [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)

## M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 11/29/09, in the evening, Mike Owen, Biologist, observed a male **American kestrel** and heard three **meadowlarks** calling over Four Stakes Prairie as well as a **Chuck-Will's Widow** on West Main. On 12/1/09, Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, and Renee Rau, Manager, saw and heard a **Great Horned owl** calling in the Park Shop area. On 12/5/09, in the evening, Mike Owen and Donna Glann-Symth, volunteer, also heard one calling around the Park office. On 12/1/09, in the evening, off of Jones Grade, Alicia Campanella, Park Ranger, observed 5 young (4 inch) **Southern Ringneck snakes**.

On 12/2/09, Mike Owen, observed approximately 500 **Tree Swallows** swirling over Janes Scenic Drive and the borrow pits. Near East Main, he also observed a **Florida Snapping turtle**. On 12/3/09, Mike Owen observed 10 **Florida chicken turtles** along Janes Scenic Drive. On 12/4/09, Donna Glann-Symth observed a tagged **Black Vulture** with other vultures on the Harmon Building. On 12/8/09, in the early evening, Mike Owen observed a 300 pound **Black bear** walking on the East side of Janes Scenic Drive just past Gate 12. Later that evening, he saw a **Whip-Poor-Will** and a **Florida Green Water snake** on Janes Scenic Drive. On 12/9/09, in the mid-morning, Robert Czarniecki, volunteer, observed a **Black bear** foraging on Jones Grade. On 12/12/09, in the morning, Ron Kotliar, volunteer, within the first two miles of Janes Scenic Drive, observed thousands of **Tree swallows** flying over head.

On 12/14/09, during the Fakahatchee Christmas Bird count on the north end, Dick Brewer, volunteer, and Karen Relish, OPS Park Ranger, highlights included a female **American Redstart** and a **Sandhill crane**. On 12/14/09, Mike Owen and Richard and Tom Trotta, volunteer, observed a **Florida Black Bear** off of Gate 19 as well as a 6 foot long **Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake** near the plugged Prairie canal. On 12/15/09, in the early afternoon, Mike Owen and Donna Glann-Smyth observed 3 **Hooded Mergansers** swimming in the North Ditch off of Janes Scenic Drive.

On 12/16/09, while in the northern portion of the Fakahatchee Strand, now part of Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Ron Kotliar and Richard Fagan, volunteer, observed a 3.5 foot long **Eastern Diamond rattlesnake** off the hiking trail. On 12/17/09, Bob Nesmith, volunteer, observed a 3.5 ft. long **Florida Cottonmouth** off of Janes Scenic Drive and a **Snapping turtle** off of US-41. On 12/17/09, at the north end of the park, Dan and Terry Wilson, volunteers, observed a **Florida panther** walking through and on 12/19/09, in the late morning, saw a **Northern Harrier** as well as approximately 300 **Tree swallows** flying over Dan House Prairie.

On 12/19/09, in the morning, David Skaf, visitor, brought to the office a partially eaten smelly snake possibly 4 foot **Black racer** that a Black Vulture had dropped on his hood approximately 2 miles North of the Park Headquarters. On 12/19/09, Ron Kotliar, observed a 250 pound **Black bear** and a **Southern Black Racer** go east to west across and near the end of Janes Scenic Drive. On 12/20/09, in the morning, at Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, Alan Murray, volunteer, observed his first **Red-headed woodpecker** at the Boardwalk.

*We are looking forward to another exciting year of wildlife observations around the Fakahatchee. Please keep the information flowing. We appreciate all your wildlife reports.*

If you want to report sightings, contact Park biologist Mike Owen or his assistant Karen Relish by phone at (239) 695-2886.



## Cigar Aficionados

by Dennis Giardina

One day in 2007, while I was still working at Fakahatchee, I got a call from a horticulturist named Matt Richards. He explained that he worked in the Orchid Conservation Department at Atlanta Botanical Garden. He told me about some of the work they have done in Florida and expressed an interest in the orchid hotspot of North America. He asked me if anything was being done to conserve the rarest orchid species on the Preserve and if there were any that we could work together to recover. I got Mike Owen on the phone and first we talked about the rat-tailed orchid and *Epidendrum acunae*. They are the so called “lost orchids” that were last seen 40 or so years ago. We discussed ways of restoring those two orchids but there were many obstacles, not the least of which was the fact that the closest place we could look for wild plants and seed was probably in Cuba.

The next candidate for conservation was the cigar orchid, *Cyrtopodium punctatum*. Cigar orchids, named after their cigar-like pseudobulbs, were once common in Fakahatchee. They are large, light-loving orchids and can be quite conspicuous in the environment, especially when they are in flower. A large plant can produce hundreds of pretty red and yellow flowers which evolved to attract a specific bee pollinator. Because of their beauty, they attracted people too. During and after the industrial logging era (1943-1957) thousands of cigar orchids were ripped off of cypress trees and removed from the Fakahatchee Strand. As the number of cigar orchids decreased from over-collection and destruction of the forest from logging and fires, their pollinators seemed to have trouble finding them and natural reproduction and recruitment took a nose dive. Currently, we only know of 20 cigar orchids in the whole Preserve.

After much discussion, Matt submitted a cigar orchid research permit application and permission was granted by the Florida Park Service to do the following: Make surveys to inventory the remaining cigar orchids at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve; Cross pollinate individual plants to diversify the local gene pool; Collect

seed and grow cigar orchids at Atlanta Botanical Garden; Bring the young cigar orchids back to Fakahatchee and attempt to establish them in appropriate areas within the Strand.

In 2008, Mike Owen and I pollinated two cigar orchids. One of them produced one seed pod that we collected this past April when Matt (right), his assistant Brad Wilson (left), John Elting, Mike Owen, and I set out to visit all the extant cigar orchids and pollinate as many of them as possible. Although we haven’t been able to revisit all of the cigar orchids we pollinated, we have gone out to see a few of them and found that we did successfully cross pollinate the two largest, healthiest individuals we knew of at the time (affectionately known as “Big Mama” and “Big Daddy”).

It takes about a year for cigar orchid seed pods to ripen so we will not be able to collect the fruits of this year’s labor until the spring of 2010. In the meantime, seeds from the pod we collected this past April were sown under sterile conditions in a laboratory at the Orchid Conservation Department and now thousands of tiny cigar orchids are growing inside sealed, glass flasks. Soon they will be removed from the flasks, transplanted into small pots and grown up in their greenhouse until they are ready to be brought down to Fakahatchee. “Then,” as Mike would say, “the real party will begin.”

I am very excited about this project and I appreciate the interest and support the Friends of Fakahatchee have given it. There will be plenty more to report over the next year or so and I look forward to sharing the news with all of you. I feel encouraged that some day we will be able to say we were part of the generation of people that not only stopped the exploitation of Fakahatchee’s orchids, but also undertook the restoration of its historic richness and diversity.

*Dennis Giardina is the Everglades Region Biologist, Invasive Plant Management Section, of the FWC and was formerly Manager of Fakahatchee Strand. He is Vice-President of FOF.*

## IN THE NEWS

An article about the Fakahatchee in the travel section of the German newspaper *Die Zeit* on 12/17/09 refers to Mike Owen as the “Peter Pan of the Fakahatchee”. To read more, see [www.zeit.de](http://www.zeit.de) and search for Fakahatchee.

Journalist Lance Shearer, who attended our dinner, wrote an article in the *Naples Daily News* about the lecture on Pythons. The online version was posted on 12/19/09 at [www.naplesnews.com](http://www.naplesnews.com) (search for Fakahatchee).

## *President's Message*

We are making progress with our plans for a visitor center and enhanced Boardwalk at Big Cypress Bend. We met with State officials at the beginning of December and await some preliminary architect's drawings.

The dinner/talk on December 13 was attended by 68 people and was a great chance to see old friends again after the summer break. The audience was captivated by the dynamic speaker, Larry Perez from Everglades National Park, and his lecture about pythons and other exotics. Thanks to Elsa Caldwell, Events Chair, for organizing the evening.

To obtain the money needed for the Boardwalk renovation, the Events Committee is planning a SAFARI which is designed to become the Friends' signature fund raiser. The SAFARI will introduce the wonders of the Fakahatchee to people who probably have never heard of it. There will be an activity-packed day followed by an authentic Florida "Cracker" style dinner with wine. See the attached invitation and ask friends to attend. They won't be disappointed!

*Tom Maish*

## **Swamp Walk Report**

Everything is in bloom! Dingys, Night Scented, Clam Shells, Rigidum, Concreta, Delicate Ionopsis, Floridense, Strobiliferum, Malaxis Spicata and Unifolia, Toothpetal, Liparis Elata and even the Pygmaea. The water is high, the otter and mink are running. The Fish-Eating spiders are fishing. We are still dodging cottonmouths and stepping on alligators (I told Carl Hiaasen about Bill Mesce surfing an alligator and he said he couldn't wait to give it a try!).

We now have three completed loop trails all fairly long when you include interpretation. One is approximately 5 hours, another 3 hours and a recently-completed loop at "CatBert slough " that includes 3 ponds and two strands of about 4 hours. These walks are all popular but we are lacking FOF participation. So come on out! If we have walkers from Europe and Alberta, we should have walkers from Naples!

Wildlife sightings on swamp walks are fairly consistent with what has been reported in the MoZone. No panther or black bear however. What I have noticed are more migratory Red Shoulder Hawks this year as apposed to native.

Paul Marinelli has joined the swamp walk team. He is a graduate of Duke University and works with Naples Capital Advisors, a wholly-owned subsidiary of TIB Bank.

Finally a few notes from Audubon:

- Record number of wood stork nestings ( 1,100 ) and fledglings in Corkscrew.
- Favorable ruling after 6 years from Federal Judge in Miami halting the Miosal development project. Let's hope it sticks for it effects the Fakahatchee water shed.
- Construction has begun, after another prolonged legal battle, on the C-111 Spreader Canal and Tamiami Trail bridge - initially approximately one mile, hopefully to be extended. This will improve water flow and quality to the lower Glades and Florida Bay where the marine life and sea grass on which it depends is in dire straights.

*Best to all, John Elting*

## **BOARDWALK REPORT**

If you have ever walked along the trail leading to the wooden boardwalk, you know that the canal along the trail is a beautiful area, but quite overgrown. Thanks to the hard work of Ranger Alicia, there are several places that are now open for viewing and photography. The vegetation along boardwalk itself has been kept well trimmed during the summer and fall by part-time Ranger Karen. We appreciate their efforts, as well as the rest of the ranger staff.

Recent wildlife observations include a bobcat that was seen by three visitors. When they came around a turn, the bobcat was standing in the middle of the boardwalk. They said it calmly climbed down and wandered off into the swamp. The same group also reported seeing a white-tailed doe and two very young fawns. A recent visitor saw a Barred owl sitting very close to the boardwalk, not far from a point where several people have seen a Great Horned owl.

Our resident bald eagle pair can be seen daily on or around their nest. This year they have added some additional building material on the side of the nest facing the boardwalk, but not enough to hinder viewing and photography. The eagles come and go from the far side of the nest. Their trips to the nest should become more regular once the eggs have hatched – normally in mid-January.

Visitors continue to be intrigued by the large bee's nest which is very visible from the observation platform at the end of the boardwalk. The presence of non-native Walking Catfish splashing in the gator hole always attracts attention, and if there is any good side of the "invasion", it is that the wading birds and alligators must find them good to eat. One male anhinga puts on a fishing (and eating) display nearly every day.

Ironically, the day after the above report was written, Caryl was showing the Great Horned Owl to some visitors and I walked on ahead. As I approached the bald eagle's nest sign, there on the boardwalk was a beautiful, full-grown, very healthy looking bobcat. He turned and walked toward the Twin Snags and then down into the swamp. What a treat!

Come and enjoy the boardwalk and tell others about it.

Nelson and Caryl Tilden  
Volunteer Naturalists



Speaker Larry Perez of Everglades National Park at the FOF dinner on 12/13/09 reminded us to report any exotic sightings (of anything, plant or animal!) to [www.EvergladesCISMA.org](http://www.EvergladesCISMA.org).

**MEMBERSHIP NEWS**

We have 257 members. *The Ghost Writer* is sent by email to 228 members, saving over \$100 per issue. Renewals for the first quarter of 2010 were sent at the beginning of January. Credit card payment for membership has now been implemented on our website.

**Welcome to new members:**

- Stephen & Debbie Barker, *The Marco Review*
- Laura Lee French, Chokoloskee
- Cameron Gillie, Madison, WI
- Lou Horwitz, Port Deposit, MD
- Eleanor Kinzie, Ft Myers
- Paul Marinelli, Naples



The FOF Presidential Walking Stick was handed down at the dinner on 12/13/09. Thought to be lost, it has now been updated with the names of Nelson Tilden, John Elting, and Tom Maish.

**Fakahatchee Discovery Series**  
Sponsored by the Friends of Fakahatchee

The Events Committee has launched the “Fakahatchee Discovery Series” as an umbrella brand name for our activities to educate the public about our unique environment. This winter two events have been scheduled.

**Coastal Cruise, 1/31/10:** boat trip to Fakahatchee Island.

**SAFARI, 2/27/10:** our new signature event, a day filled with adventure and exploration, culminating in a Cracker Dinner.

Invitations and reservation forms are included with this newsletter and are available on our website where you can book online using credit cards. For more info, phone Marya at (239) 695-2905.

**JSD Delays**

There are plans to replace the culverts on Janes Scenic Drive. Be prepared for delays, especially during working hours in the week days. Phone the Park office for more info at (239) 695-4593.

Rookery Bay is holding its annual “Nature Festival” on January 15-17. For info, see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org).

**What Are We? Who Are We?**

The Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation, is the Citizen Support Organization of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, the largest cypress strand in the world and the deepest slough in the greater Everglades. Its 80,000 acres are bordered by I-75 (Alligator Alley), US-41 (Tamiami Trail), SR-29, Fakahatchee Bay, and Picayune State Forest.

*The mission of the Friends of Fakahatchee is to aid in the preservation of this ecologically unique area and to educate the public about its importance.*

*The Ghost Writer*, named after the endangered Ghost Orchid which blooms in the Preserve, is edited by Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation of over 300 copies.

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|-----------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| OFFICERS: | President – Tom Maish | Vice-President – Dennis Giardina |               |                 |               |
|           | Secretary – vacant    | Treasurer – Vicky Nagle          |               |                 |               |
| BOARD:    | Allen Caldwell        | Elsa Caldwell                    | Saul Friess   | Dennis Giardina | Tom Maish     |
|           | Susan O’Farrell       | David Shindle                    | Glenn Stacell | Jay Staton      | Carol Swingle |

**NEW ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP**

date \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to “FOF” and send to: *FOF Membership, P.O.Box 35, Everglades City, FL, 34139*

Individual (\$20)  Family (\$30)  Business (\$50)  Patron (\$100)  Benefactor (\$500)  extra (\$\_\_\_\_\_)

Youth (\$10) birth date: month \_\_\_\_\_ day \_\_\_\_\_ year \_\_\_\_\_ (members under 18 years old must select this)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
STREET / P.O.BOX: \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_  
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**MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:**

JAN  FEB  MAR  APR  MAY  JUN  JUL  AUG  SEP  OCT  NOV  DEC