



The Ghost Writer

MARCH, 2010

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturday
4th Tuesday

starting November 14 through April
Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child
Reservations Required.
Phone (239) 695-1023

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

1st Saturday

Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child
Reservations Required.
Phone (239) 695-1023

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2nd Saturday, 3rd Tuesday

March 13: North Lakes Clean-up
March 16: Culverts
If you can help, phone (239) 695-1023.

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, March 14, 10:00 a.m.
Port of the Islands

ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC

Sunday, March 21, 12:00 noon
Mesce Pavilion, Copeland
RSVP to (239) 695-2905

ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING

ANNUAL MEMBERS' DINNER

Sunday, April 11
Port of the Islands, East Naples
More Details in our Next Issue.

AMAZING ADVENTURES

"Whale Watching in the Sea of Cortez"
by Ralph Arwood & Deborah Jansen
Friday, April 2, 6:30 p.m.
See www.rookerybay.org

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 1/20/10, Renee Rau, Park Manager, Steve Houseknecht, Park Services, observed a small **Gray Fox** in Doe Prairie. On 1/22/10, Mike Owen, Park Biologist, observed a **Coyote** on Janes Scenic Drive. On 1/31/10, in the early morning, FOF Members Tom & Deborah Trotta observed an un-collared **Florida Panther** near Gate 12 or East Main.

On 2/2/10, Volunteer Fred Townsend Terrance Craig, Park Ranger, and Alicia Campanella, Park Ranger, observed an **Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake** near the cypress and sawgrass around a borrow pit off JSD. It was again observed on 2/3/10 by Mike Owen, Renee Rau, and Volunteer Barbara Stoner. On 2/2/10, Mike Owen observed a **Black Rail** in the East Prairies in 1-2 inch deep water and 3 ft. tall grass. On 2/3/10, Mike Owen observed a **Short-Tailed Hawk** (white morph) circling from east to west over JSD with two vultures. A **Red-Shouldered Hawk** was also heard calling. Later, he observed two **Whip-Poor-Wills** on West Main and on JSD. On 2/4/10, Terrance Craig observed a **Florida Chicken Turtle** laying eggs near Park Headquarters On 2/6/10, along JSD, Mike Owen heard a **Carolina Wren** calling and saw a **White-Eyed Vireo** with a group from Collier Audubon Society. Over the Harmon lakes, Mike and the Collier Audubon group also observed a **Bald Eagle** and over 100,000 **Tree Swallows**.

On 2/11/10, in the morning, Dr Elaine & Jack Berninger and Jan & Peter Tomilson saw a **River Otter** between Gate 7 and 12. In the afternoon, they also saw a **Bobcat** on JSD south of Gate 12 walking along the road with crows descending around it and forcing it into the swamp. On 2/12/10, Visitors Adrian and Todd Bauer observed an adult **Florida Panther** just south of the Prairie canal. On 2/12/10, Mike Owen observed 2 **Muscovy Ducks** landing on Fire-Tower Pond. On 2/16/10, near the end of JSD, visitors Tom & Beth Pulice and Vincent & Sandra DeMicco saw 2 **Florida Panther** adults run to the North. They even captured the event on video!

On 2/18/10, Visitor Donovan Dean reported two adult **Bald Eagles** over Ballard pond, a swamp lake in the center of the Fakahatchee Strand. On 2/27/10, as part of The SAFARI, the Birding Group saw an **Immature Bald Eagle** perched on the osprey platform over the Harmon lake and a **Northern Harrier** flying low over the marsh located in the Northwest corner of SR-29/US-41.

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

ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC

Sunday, March 21, at 12:00 noon
Mesce Pavilion, Copeland, FL

Join Us for Traditional FOF Fun
Grilled Hotdogs, Salads, Homemade Desserts
Live Music, Raffle, Walks, Canoe/Kayak Trips
SEE PAGE 2 FOR DETAILS



Visit www.friendsoffakahatchee.org for events, newsletters, colored tram map, history, and more.

EVENTS & SAFARI SNAPS



Captain Franklin Adams told stories at The SAFARI bonfire after FOF founding-member Cindy Hackney sang. People gathered at the merchandise tent for book-signings by Clyde Butcher, Glen Stacell, and Marya Repko and a display of photos by Jay Staton. Karen Relish was on the Boardwalk Bird Walk. Thanks to Jay and Karen for photos.

Free Panther Month Events

Save-the-Florida-Panther Month kicks off on **Saturday, March 6**, with a day at Naples Zoo and continues during March with a number of free events ending up on **Saturday, March 20**, with a day of Buggy Rides, walks, and talks at the Panther Refuge (SR-29 just north of I-75). Among the activities during the month are a Swamp Walk led by Mike Owen, Photo Workshop with Larry Richardson, presentation by Lisa Hamilton at the Naples Preserve, and a bike ride in Bear Island. For more info, see www.floridapanther.org and click on the Calendar button.



PANTHER FUNDRAISER

The 116-mile "Panther Prowl Poker Run" takes place on **Sunday, March 28**, and starts at Cracklin' Jack's on CR-951 between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m. For more info, contact Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge president Lisa Ostberg at (239) 642-5472.



ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC

The early FOF picnics were held out in the preserve and everyone brought food to share. It's logistically difficult to transport 100 people into the swamp so this year we will again meet in the Mesce Pavilion which is just down the road from the Park office in Copeland. It will be marked and volunteers will direct you to parking.

The picnic will be held on **Sunday, March 21**, starting at 12:00 noon. Everyone is asked to contribute a favorite dish. If you would like to attend, please email FOF_90@hotmail.com or phone Marya at (239) 695-2905.

BigC Preserve at BigC Market

On **Friday, March 19**, there will be a talk at 10:30 a.m. at the Big Cypress Market Place (on US-41 just south of CR-951) by Big Cypress National Preserve Ranger Julia Greer titled "Symbiosis" about how plants and animals live together.

On **Friday, April 2**, Ranger Justin Mercer will talk about the barred owl which thrives in our tropical swamps.

New Welcome Center

The new Big Cypress Swamp Welcome Center in Ochopee will be officially opened from 12:00 noon to 4:00 p.m. on **Saturday, March 20**.

ORCHID SHOW & SALE

The 37th Annual Naples Orchid Show takes place on the weekend of **March 19-21** in McSpadden Hall at the Naples United Church of Christ, 5200 Crayton Road, Naples, near the Waterside Shops. For info, see www.NaplesOrchidSociety.org or phone (239) 403-7155.



JOB VACANT

Executive Director sought for Everglades Association which supports the National Park Service. Send resume and covering letter with 3 references to miami-employment@hotmail.com.

The Fruit of the Ecosystem

by Dennis Giardina

From the time I was a little boy I dreamed of living in a place where there were big cats. The Eastern mountain lion of the forests of my childhood had been extinct for a century by the time I was born and I feel very fortunate to be able to work with Florida panthers in the wild. I came to South Florida in June of 1996 determined to do so. Even though I was hired to be the first Biological Science Technician of the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, my boss told me from the very beginning that I probably wouldn't have much of a chance to get involved hands-on with the species. At that time one group of people, working for the then Florida Game and Fish Commission were responsible for the active management of Florida panthers, finding them, capturing them, radio-collaring them and monitoring their movements. In those days the species was still pretty close to the edge. They were much more susceptible to the pressures of their environment. They had been isolated in South Florida for a long time, inbred and genetically less able to rebound on their own. In June of 1996, there may have only been 30 to 50 adult panthers left and they were in trouble.

Over the years I'd see the panther capture team come and go from Florida Panther NWR. They were the only other people allowed free access to the 25,000 acre refuge which was closed to the public to provide an oasis for Florida panthers and their primary prey species, white-tailed deer. As time went by, I progressed from just waving or saying hello to the members of the capture team to having casual conversations with them. I was dying to know everything possible about their work with panthers and what they were doing, but I had to play it cool. I'd witnessed other people's sincere offers of service and expressions of desire to go out with them receive a sort of kindly rejection, and I refused to put myself in that position. For a long, long time I watched them from the sidelines, if not accepting my fate, trying to deal with the apparent fact that it was never going to happen for me. My consolation was that at least I had an opportunity to become more familiar with Florida panthers by following their tracks on the Panther Refuge, radio-tracking them before prescribed burns, and learning my way around their environment.

One thing I did have was a front row seat for the recovery of the Florida panther. In 1995, after just about every other option was tried and failed to recover the panther population, the multi-agency Panther Recovery Team decided to attempt genetic introgression, a scientific term for bringing fresh, new genes to glue up the unraveling double helices of Florida panthers. This was mostly made possible by Roy McBride and his hounds. They caught eight female Texas cougars, the next nearest subspecies, and brought them to South Florida. They were strategically released across the Everglades and Big Cypress ecosystem and by about the year 2003, when the last two Texas cougars were removed from the wild, the much healthier Florida panther that they and their kittens helped to bolster began to flourish. Panthers began to reoccupy areas

where they hadn't been seen in decades, most notably throughout the almost 800,000-acre Big Cypress National Preserve. Underneath I-75, across Airplane Prairie, Raccoon Point and US-41, down through the Loop into the Ten Thousand Islands and over to Shark Valley Slough, the cat came back!

A couple of years into the 21st Century, as the condition of the Florida panthers continued to improve, my luck seemed to turn around too. One day while talking to Roy McBride, I told him that I was going to Puerto Rico on a detail to work with parrots in the rainforest. He asked me if I could climb trees and I told him that I could. At that time, a second panther capture team was being formed by Deborah Jansen at Big Cypress to take over the monitoring efforts in the Preserve south of I-75 and they needed a tree climber. So in early 2003, Roy, Deborah's technicians Steve, Bob and I went out a couple of times to train with the climbing spikes before the new capture team's first season. I was thinking that, finally, after seven long years I was going to get in on a piece of the action. That was until I got a phone call from Deborah saying, "Thanks for training with my guys but Steve Schulze is going to be our tree climber and we'll call you if we need any help." After that I could barely hear her over the sound of my heart, crashing through the floor.

As fate would have it, Deborah called me again two weeks later, explaining that Steve was injured during a capture and asked me if I could come and help them for the rest of their season? When it was over she invited me to be part of her team the following year and since then, folks, my dream has come true. I've been able to experience some of the most remote places in South Florida and work with people that I respect and admire in many ways. I continue to learn about and be inspired by the wilderness of the Everglades and Big Cypress region. Every year I understand a little better the habits and haunts of Florida panthers and I've gotten to know some individual panthers pretty intimately.

To me the Florida Panther embodies the mystery and majesty of nature, the enigmatic force of life. In a physical sense, their existence is the product of a dynamic ecological equation. In a very real way, they are the fruit of the ecosystem.

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.

With thanks to Ralph Arwood for this photo of Dennis and friends taken on February 25, 2010.



The Tale of the Everglades Mink

by Angie Chestnut



February 21, 2010

Alan and I had spent the day exploring Tram 12 in the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve. As we were heading out on Janes Scenic Drive, we caught a glimpse of a little brown animal running along the side of the road. I looked closer and saw that it was an Everglades Mink! We stopped the Jeep and I quickly grabbed the camera.

Unfortunately, the camera had the wide angle 17- 40mm lens on it.

No time to change – I thought for sure that she'd run into the swamp before I could get a shot.

Fortunately, this little mink was in a playful mood and even let me within an arms reach. The wide angle lens worked after all! I called out with a squeak and the mink would stop to check me out. She'd then run into the brush, I'd squeak to her and she'd run back out to me.

We played this game for a while and then she decided it was time to take a nap. I hated to leave her – she was so tiny. I could have fit her in my cupped hands. We marked the spot where she fell asleep by putting sticks in the road. Alan took the GPS coordinates and we proceeded to the Ranger Station to tell them about the mink.

Along the way, we came across a group of people and saw that Park Biologist Mike Owen was one of them. We told him about the Mink and our concern about it's young age (and one bad eye) and he said that he would go there to find him. He said that this was the first Everglades Mink sighting of the decade and they only had two sightings last year.

Update 02.24.10

IT'S A GIRL!!! I just got an email from Mike Owen. They found my little Everglades Mink. She's now at the Conservancy of SW FL in Naples. They determined that she's a female and a veterinarian is looking after her eye. She's eating fish and seems in good health.

Update 02.26.10

I called the Conservancy for an update. I spoke to a Wildlife Rehabilitation Specialist. She told me that the mink was doing well. She's stable and eating fine and there didn't seem to be any structural damage. Right away I was confused and wondered if we were even talking about the same mink.

I stopped her and told her that I didn't understand because the mink that I found didn't appear to have an injury other than an infected eye. She told me that she has a neurological disorder and is a bit unstable when she walks. I guess I just didn't notice this as she was darting in and out of the brush so quickly. They did not find any other sign of damage so they don't think the injury came from an animal attack. Perhaps it's from falling out of a tree or something along those lines.

I asked if she thought that the mink would ever be rehabilitated and released into the wild. This of course can not be determined at this time. She stated that the neurological damage is something that would have to be monitored. Their main concern at this point is the eye. They have a specialist coming in tomorrow to look at it and should know more by tomorrow afternoon.

Update 03.01.10

JoAnn from the Conservancy called with an update. The mink is going to be non-visual in the one eye. On a better note, she seems to be getting around much better. They're going to put her in a larger containment and see how she does. If she continues to show progress, they hope to release her back into the wild very soon.



Angie Chestnut is a Florida Landscape & Nature Photographer whose work can be seen at www.GladesPix.com. She is a member of FOF. Angie has graciously given us permission to reprint this story from www.angiechestnut.blogspot.co.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO HELP ANIMALS

If you can drive small injured wild animals into the Conservancy in Naples (near Coastland Mall), phone Jessica at (239) 262-2273.

President's Message

The SAFARI was a hit!

Elsie Caldwell, Events Chair with Nelson Tilden and 44 Friends Volunteers plus Renee Rau Park Manager and the Park Staff from the Fakahatchee assisted by staff from Collier Seminole, Corkscrew, Delnor-Wiggins, and Koreshan State Parks, all were there to make sure our Guests had a great SAFARI.

This was the largest event that the Friends of Fakahatchee had ever conducted and it all came together despite the rainy and windy weather that tested everyone.

Several Guests commented to me how friendly and knowledgeable the Volunteers were to insure that the Guests had a real Fakahatchee experience. Thank Marya Repko for all the coordination of activities, maps and responses to Guest's questions prior to the event

Friends member, Kathy Nederveld brought 23 Guests while member Art Cullman sold another 16 Guests on the SAFARI plus had 2 others make donations!

Despite the rain and wind; when Folks came in from the first round of activities they were ready to go out again for the next set. At this time Grant Fischer of The Conservancy of Southwest Florida displayed and talked about the Barn Owl that accompanied him.

After activities were completed and Folks returned to camp, Ranger Steve Houseknecht lit the bonfire for people to warm up before dinner. Redwood Creek provided wine tasting for "attitude adjustment hour" while people talked with Clyde & Niki Butcher and viewed Jay Staton's and Rick Cruz's photos.

The Florida Cracker dinner commenced and would you believe -- we ran out of Collard Greens!

After dinner Guests gathered around the bonfire to listen to founder-member Cindy Hackney sing about the Fakahatchee and Capt Franklin Adams tell stories of "days bygone" in the Swamp.

At 8:30 there were still people enjoying the company around the campfire. Many Guests commented on leaving that they will be back next year.

THANK YOU to all who helped make the SAFARI a success, introducing new people to the wonders of the Fakahatchee.

See you there in 2011 ...

Tom Maish



Dark skies and blustery rain did not discourage attendees from wandering around the grounds at The SAFARI on February 27.

BOARDWALK REPORT

Despite some cool temperatures and occasional rain, over 14,000 visitors experienced the boardwalk this month. Our unusual winter rains have resulted in higher water levels than we have seen for several years. Many of the areas along the boardwalk that are usually dry by the first of March are still wet, much to the delight of many who visit only at this time of year. One result of higher water levels is the lack of shallow areas for some of our wading birds at the alligator hole. Consequently, they have been fewer in number than usual.

Our bald eagle pair continues their feeding trips to the nest, although the chicks are still too small to be seen. By the middle to end of March, the chicks should make their appearance and thereafter be seen fairly regularly until they fledge in April or early May.

The frost damage to some of our ferns, strangler figs, mangrove, wild coffee and royal palm trees was very noticeable at the beginning of February, but many of the plants are already showing signs of regrowth. We are hopeful that none of the royal palms, in particular, will be permanently harmed. Our annual survey of royal palm trees that are visible from the boardwalk resulted in documenting nearly 100 of them this year.

We are pleased to report that a new sign at our "iron ranger" donation box has resulted in greater contributions. The sign says "suggested donation - \$2/adult." Whether it is the sign or the higher number of visitors, our donations have greatly increased. We appreciate the generous support shown by boardwalk visitors.

The level of bee activity at our honey bee nest at the end of the boardwalk has lessened in recent weeks. The honeycomb is still spectacular and has been the object of many photographs.

The boardwalk was used as the site for two birding walks during the FOF's recent, and highly successful, Safari fundraiser. During the walk and the bus ride to and from the Safari event center at park headquarters, birding leaders Dick Brewer and Karen Relish documented the sightings of 46 different species of birds. Participants in the event were highly complimentary of Dick and Karen and we appreciate their efforts.

No matter what kind of a nature enthusiast you are, the boardwalk has something interesting for you to see. Come and join us...

Nelson and Caryl Tilden
Volunteer Naturalists



Clyde Butcher talking to Swamp Walk Leader John Elting (left) and FOF Director David Shindle at The SAFARI.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 281 memberships in good standing. Reminders were sent at the beginning of March.

The Ghost Writer is emailed to 260 members, saving over \$114 per issue. If we do not have your email address, please send it to us. We will only use it for official FOF business and will not share it.

Welcome to new members:

- Willis Ashworth, Naples
- V. Alin Botoman, Ft Lauderdale
- Henry Clifford, Palmetto Bay
- Mary E. Cronin, Dallas, TX
- Alan Erickson, Cape Coral
- Rose Flynn, Miami
- Candis Harbinson, Panama City
- Kenneth Henninger, Naples
- Edward Hess, Venice
- Susan Kuhar, Naples
- Ronald Lindhart, Fernandina Beach
- Kurt & Margaret Mannchen
- John Oberle, Naples
- Connie Oleson & John Hughes, Briny Breezes
- Keith Sullivan, Naples
- Fay Weaver, Everglades City
- Sarah Weissinger, Delray Beach

Of these 17 new members since our last newsletter, 6 joined using PayPal on our website.



Jack Shealy of Everglades Adventure Tours (who conducts pole boat trips in the Fakahatchee) spoke to Rick Cruz in front of Rick's photo display at The SAFARI.

Annual Meeting & Dinner

Official ballots for the election of Directors will be posted shortly to all paid-up memberships. Each membership is entitled to one vote. Please return the ballot marked with your preferences in its special envelope.

The results will be announced at the Annual Members' Meeting on **Sunday, April 11**. A dinner/talk will follow the formal proceedings so please save the date. We will have details in the next issue of the newsletter and on our website.

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 Friends of Fakahatchee strive 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 – Susan O'Farrell	Treasurer – Saul Friess			
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 _____

EMAIL _____

STREET / P.O.BOX: _____

ALTERNATE ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

PHONE _____

MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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