



# The Ghost Writer

MAY 2011

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee, "Home of the Ghost Orchid"

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

resume in November

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

resume in November

### VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

resume in November

### BOARD MEETING

Sunday, May 15, 10:00 p.m.

Port of the Islands

For info, phone (305) 588-9886

### NEW BOARD & OFFICERS

Welcome to new Board members:

Dino Barone  
Cynthia Peters  
Francine Stevens  
Charles Wright  
John Winebrenner

At the Board meeting on April 10, the following officers were elected:

President – Howard Lubel  
Vice-President – Glen Stacell  
Secretary – Francine Stevens  
Treasurer – Dino Barone

Some Committee chairs have been appointed but **members are still needed:**

Finance – Ken Shapiro  
Governance – John Winebrenner  
Vision – Dennis Giardina  
Events – Cynthia Peters  
Public Relations  
Interpretation – Glen Stacell  
Merchandise – Charles Wright  
Scrap Book  
Website – Jay Staton, Rose Flynn  
Membership – Marya Repko

If you would like to serve, contact the President at (305) 588-9886.

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

On 2/21/11, in the early evening, Mike Owen (MO), Park Biologist, observed a 4-foot long **Eastern Mud Snake** near the Water Treatment Plant. On 2/27/11, around 11AM, MO observed a **River Otter** around Gate 12/East Main. On 3/3/11, in the early evening, MO observed two **Wood Ducks** flying northeast over Ballard Pond off of East Main Tram. On 3/4/11, around 1PM, MO observed a **Northern Harrier** over the East Prairies flying to the east. On 3/14/11, in the late evening, MO observed a **Coyote** about four miles east of Faka-Union Canal going North to South across US-41.

On 3/15/11, in the early evening, MO observed an **American Bittern** near Gate 12 near the east ditch. On 3/22/11, Steven Bass, OPS, observed an adult **Bobcat** going across Jones Grade to the North. On 3/23/11, MO observed an adult **Bald Eagle** flying to the West about 200 yards North of Park Headquarters as well as three **Red-shouldered Hawks** and an **Osprey** flying above the shop. On 3/31/11, MO observed a **Red-tailed Hawk** about three miles North of Gate 1 off of Janes Scenic Drive (JSD) that flew to the south southwest over the recently prescribed burned prairie.

On 4/1/11, around 10AM, MO heard a medium sized **American alligator** bellowing in a slough off of JSD about two miles North of Gate 1. On 4/7/11, around 3:45PM, Jeff Kneisley, Park Ranger, observed a 2.5 foot long **Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake** near Prairie Canal. On 4/10/11, around 4PM, Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, observed two **Northern Flickers** mating on a telephone pole near the Copeland Firetower. On 4/10/11, on a clear and calm evening, MO and Donna Glann-Smyth, volunteer, observed a **Gray Kingbird** hawking insects from the wires north of Park Headquarters.

On 4/12/11, in the early morning, Alicia Campanella, Park Ranger, observed a sub-adult **River Otter** off of SR-29 about a mile North of JSD. On 4/12/11, around 4:30PM, Alicia Campanella also observed an adult **Bobcat** off of SR-29 and Jones Grade. On 4/17/11, around 3PM, Renee Rau, Park Manager, observed a pair of **Swallow-tailed Kites** flying over the Park Shop area.

We also received these observations by email:

On Sunday, April 10, 2011, at approximately 4:00 PM, FOF member, Rose Flynn, saw a bobcat dash across the tram approximately 1.2 miles north of gate 15.

What a beautiful place. We drove through it once and it was uncongested. We saw 3 deer. It's one place in nature that mankind hasn't figured out a way to mess up. Guard it with your life. Thanks, Harold Tinker (*sent 4/21/11*).

Near Gate 12 on April 3: ospreys, red-shouldered hawks, ibis, great blue herons, anhingas, water moccasin (3-foot), yellow rat snake (4-foot), approx 30 alligators in pond; one large gator was moving all the others, one at a time, from south side. Every day in the Fakahatchee is a GREAT day. Dino Barone.

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

***This will be the last newsletter until the fall ... unless we have exciting news.  
HAVE A GOOD SUMMER!***

Visit [www.orchidswamp.org](http://www.orchidswamp.org) for events, newsletters, colored tram map, history, and more.

## Cigar Orchid Restoration Project Update

by Dennis Giardina

Last week a dream came true when 88 cigar orchids (*Cyrtopodium punctatum*) that were grown using genetics from the few known Fakahatchee plants were experimentally restored to the Preserve. This project began in 2008 by pollinating cigar orchids and collecting their seed pods. With the help of collaborators at Atlanta Botanical Garden, the seeds were taken and cultivated at their Orchid Conservation Center. At Atlanta Botanical Garden, the process of growing cigar orchids by seed begins in a laboratory under sterile conditions. Once the seeds have germinated and have grown into small plants, they are removed from the lab and put into a greenhouse where they grow for about a year and half.

Cigar orchids have large seed pods containing millions of seeds. All of the cigar orchid seed pods that were taken to Atlanta were sent back after the small amount of seeds that were needed were removed. Mike Owen and I then took the seed pods back out to near where they were collected and we hung them up so that the thousands of dusty seeds could disperse naturally on wind currents. However, first we walked around tapping seeds from the pods onto the bark of trees. We didn't really expect much, but somehow something worked. We now have a handful of cigar orchid seedlings in Fakahatchee that germinated from seed in the wild. We didn't know this was possible!

I would like to thank Matt Richards, Ron Determann, Danielle Ferreira and Jenny Cruse Sanders from Atlanta Botanical Garden for all their hard work. I would also like to thank the Friends of Fakahatchee for their financial and philosophical support of this conservation project. Here's to a Fakahatchee future that lights up every spring with the flowery "bee swarms" of thousands of cigar orchids.

*Dennis Giardina is the Everglades Region Biologist for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and was formerly the Park Manager of Fakahatchee Strand. He is Chair of the FOF Vision Committee.*



photos thanks to Dennis Giardina & Michael Cosgrove



## Art in the Preserve – In Plein Air

by Karen Relish

After participating in the International Sketch Crawl Day, another artist and I decided we wanted to continue to sketch outside on a more regular basis. I work part-time as a Park Ranger at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. With permission, we set up a trial run for this event on the third Saturday of the month, from 10AM to 2PM, starting in February. Next year, we hope to start in January.

In February, just off of Janes Scenic Drive and after a prescribed burn, another artist and I sketched while sitting within the burned area. In March, after obtaining additional permission, we had the opportunity to sketch and one of the participants journaled in front of the charming cypress planked white Copeland Baptist Church. Reverend John Gilmore

provided us an impromptu and delightfully informative tour of the beautiful church.

In April, we chose to sketch off of Old 41 North. Luckily, with the breeze the bugs abated. We were visited by a Banded Water snake, a low flying Swallow-tailed Kite, a Snowy egret, a Tri-colored heron, a Little blue heron, a juvenile White Ibis, and vultures both Black and Turkeys. I learned from another artist a better technique when using water color pencils to better capture the nuances of the water. One of the participants played her flute!

To see images from the past year's Art in the Preserve Event, see <http://natureartjournal.blogspot.com/p/events.html>. I look forward to next year. If you want to participate in this event, please contact me at the Park office at 239-695-2886.

## President's Message

When Rose and I first walked the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk about ten years ago, I never imagined we would walk in waist deep water in the swamp one day soon thereafter. I had never heard of the Friends of the Fakahatchee, so I never thought of being president. A random conversation with a friend in the Dade County Courthouse was my introduction to the FOF. I became a member. Now I know people who have shown me windows into the Preserve I never would have found on my own. I am constantly learning about our jewel of a park from FOF members I see in the swamp or in Everglades City. I consider myself quite fortunate to be a member of FOF as well as the president.

The coming year promises to be a busy one as FOF undertakes significant projects. Foremost among these is the Boardwalk Facilities Development project. We are working to enhance the visitor experience by partnering with the state to finalize an expansion plan that will allow our guests to experience the prairies and old growth areas that have called to all of us. Permanent restrooms and safer parking are intended to be part of the project. We will continue the efforts of the last Board to move this project forward in a manner consistent with the identity of the Preserve.

While your Board is enthusiastic about achieving its goals, additional member participation is unreservedly welcome. FOF has numerous committees that work to accomplish our mission of supporting the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve. These include committees for events, education and interpretation, vision, finance and merchandise. The work done by these groups turn our goals into reality. You can help make FOF more effective by giving some of your time for committee participation.

Presently, the Board is formulating goals for the 2011-2012 year. We want your input. You can contact me by e-mail at [lubelm@aol.com](mailto:lubelm@aol.com) anytime with your comments, criticisms or offers of help. Please remember, the Board works for all FOF.

See you in the swamp,  
Howard Lubel



Thanks to new Board member Dino Barone for this photo of a swamp walk led by Bill Mesce on April 16.

## BOARDWALK REPORT

It won't be long now before our two eagle babies leave the nest and head out on their own for good. They have been making short flights for over a week, but still return to the nest. The smaller of the two is nearly full size now and we are pleased that it survived those early weeks when it was so much smaller than its older sibling. Visitors have really enjoyed watching and photographing their development and they have certainly been our main attraction this year. A little girl and her family were intrigued with the idea of "fledging". When they heard that the parent eagles will most likely return to the same nest next fall she said, "Who knows?" Maybe one of the babies will come back to visit, and it will say, 'Hi, mommy. Hi, daddy. I'm your child!'"

We have a mother alligator with one baby occupying the small pond where the canal meets the wooden boardwalk. Neither of the females in the alligator hole had young this year. The alligator hole is covered with duck weed and is getting smaller every day.

A visitor and his family reported seeing an animal today that fit the description of an Everglades mink. It was very close to the location where Dennis, Nelson and Tom saw one last year. Dennis was even able to photograph it. They showed Nelson where it had been, but unfortunately it was gone. Earlier in the winter a visitor reported seeing one as well.

Our red shouldered hawk was on the edge of the nest today and appeared to be feeding young. The side of the nest facing the Boardwalk (and the identifying sign) seems to have been built a little higher this year, sort of like a privacy fence!

All the plants in the swamp forest are flourishing this year. Button bush has begun to bloom, and of course the poison ivy has never looked healthier.

This will be our last monthly report until October. The boardwalk has treated several thousand visitors to a taste of "old Florida" over the course of the fall and winter. If you are not one of them, we look forward to having you visit in the fall.

Caryl Tilden  
Volunteer naturalist



Thanks to members Jim & Niki Woodard who snapped one of the eaglets at the Boardwalk on April 10.

**MEMBERSHIP NEWS**

We have 336 paid memberships including 39 from the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter who are in arrears plus 12 Introductory members. Reminders have been sent to those who have not paid. Renewal notices for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter were posted at the beginning of April. Thanks to everyone who replied promptly!

The breakdown by location is:

Naples	105	Bonita	15
ECity	23	Miami	21
Ft Myers	11	Marco	8

You can join or renew on our website with a credit card.

**Welcome to new members:**

- Steve Greene, Weston
- Van & June Saylor, St Petersburg
- Robin Welbourn, Perry Hall, MD
- John Winebrenner, Naples
- Craig & Bonnie Woodward, Marco Island

***THANKS!***

- to Peace River Audubon for another generous donation,
- to Everglades Area Tours of Chokoloskee for donations after the Paddle-In on February 19,
- to Friends of Everglades River of Grass Greenway (FROGG) for its donation after the Everglades Bike Ride (*right column*).

**ANNUAL DINNER**



Outgoing FOF President Tom Maish handed over the “presidential walking stick” to Howard Lubel at the Annual Members’ Meeting & Dinner on April 10. Tom later received the Mel Finn Award for outstanding service to the Fakahatchee.

***Bike Ride Benefits FOF***



The Annual Everglades Bike Ride included a off-road trip up Janes Drive. FOF members Howard Lubel and Dino Barone helped out at the Carnestown (US-41/SR-29) rest stop. FOF will receive a donation this year. See [www.EvergladesROGG.org](http://www.EvergladesROGG.org).

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

The **Friends of Fakahatchee, 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 – Howard Lubel      | Vice-President – Glen Stacell  |
|           | Secretary – Francine Stevens  | Treasurer – Dino Barone  |
| BOARD:    | Dino Barone    Julia Cardenas | Frank Denninger    Dennis Giardina    Cindy Hackney    Howard Lubel    |
|           | Tom Maish    Cynthia Peters   | Glen Stacell    Francine Stevens    Charles Wright    John Winebrenner |

**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: _____	<u>ALTERNATE ADDRESS</u> _____
CITY _____	CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____	STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____	PHONE _____

**MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:**

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