



The Ghost Writer

NOVEMBER 2011

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturday

starting on November 12

Cost: \$60 (\$50 for members)

Reservations Required.

Phone (239) 695-1023

or email islandgirlm@msn.com

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2nd Saturday, 3rd Tuesday

Saturday, November 12

Tuesday, November 15

See article on page 3

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, Nov 6, 10:00 a.m.

Ranger Station, Copeland

For info, phone (305) 588-9886

Welcome Back Dinner/Talk

Saturday, Dec 3, 5:00 p.m.

Everglades Seafood Depot

See page 3

PLAN AHEAD

Jan 21: Everglades Ultras

Jan 21: Coastal Cruise

Feb 25: Coastal Cruise

March 10: Coastal Cruise

March 25: Members' Picnic

March 25: Coastal Cruise

April 15: Annual Dinner

For info, phone (239) 695-2905 or see our website www.orchidswamp.org where you can book online or print out a reservation form to post with your check. You can also download the calendar of events.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 9/2/2011, around noon time, just before West Main, a visitor reported seeing an adult **Everglades Mink** look at him and then run across Janes Scenic Drive (JSD) into the East ditch. On 9/4/2011, late afternoon, a visitor reported seeing a **Florida Panther**, large, thin and without a collar crossing JSD. On 9/7/2011, in the morning, Mike Owen, Biologist, reported still seeing 5 **Eastern Kingbirds** in Fakahatchee, especially in the first few miles of JSD, with their white terminal band on the end of their tail "as if they dipped their end of their tail in white paint."

On 9/8/2011, in the late morning, Mike Owen observed a **Wood Duck** off of East Main. On 9/17/2011, in the early evening, Mike Owen observed 2 **Mynahs** on SR-29 and US-41 at the Carnestown intersection. On 9/25/2011, in the late evening, Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, observed 6 **Common Nighthawks** flying over the Fire Tower. On 9/27/2011, Mike Owen observed an **American Bittern** flying up from the wet prairie, about 3-5 inches of water, within Four Stakes Prairie. On 9/30/2011, Renee Rau, Park Manager, and Steve Houseknecht also observed another American Bittern in about the same place. On 9/27/2011, at 9:43AM, Mike Owen observed a **Pied-Billed Grebe**, his first observed this season, swimming in the canal off of US-41.

On 9/30/2011, at 10:14AM, Mike Owen observed a **Sharp-shinned hawk** fly to the southeast over the Park Headquarters. On 9/30/2011, at 10:40AM, Mike Owen observed a **Hermit Thrush** perched in a Live Oak near Park Headquarters and another one on 10/12/2011 observed perching in a Brazilian Pepper on East Main. On 10/2/2011, at 7:50AM, on a cool and sunny morning, Michael Cullinan, "watched a small **bobcat** on JSD between Gates 2-7. It was crouching on the drive then walked to the north side only to reappear immediately with what looked like a squirrel in its mouth then stroll off the drive to the south."

On 10/9/2011, Bill and Sharon Pitkin, while reading JSD Staff gauges, observed three **Belted Kingfishers** flying over JSD. On 10/12/11, Mike Owen and Karen Relish, OPS Ranger, observed their first **monarch butterfly** of the season, flying south over East Main. On 10/17/2011, prior to Gate 2, Mike Owen observed an **American Kestrel** fly north then to the south-southeast over JSD. On 10/18/2011, in the mid afternoon, along JSD, Stephen Bass, Exotic Species Removal Specialist, observed an **American Alligator** that had captured a **Florida Spotted Gar** which was still flopping on the drive. The alligator then took the gar back off the drive into the grass out of sight. On 10/18/11, around 2PM, Donna Day and Ernie Winn observed a **Limpkin** near Gate 12 and on 10/19/2011 two **Wood storks**, one mature and one immature on the drive near Gate 2.

On 10/24/11 at 6:40 PM, Mike Owen heard 2 **King Rails** calling from the wet prairie about 1.5 mile north of the Copeland fire tower. On 10/26/11 at 2:30 PM, Mike Owen saw the first **Florida chicken turtle** of the season digging a hole in Janes Scenic Drive in an attempt to lay eggs. With the help of Bill & Sharon Pitkin, volunteers, he escorted her to the side of the road to prevent her from nesting where the eggs would be crushed.

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

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



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED! **EVERGLADES ULTRAS**

by Cynthia Peters, FOF Events Chair

Friends of the Fakahatchee members have the opportunity to help out at the inaugural Everglades Ultras Marathons, taking place on January 21, in the Fakahatchee. Three races are planned with varying distances; 50 mile, 50 kilometer, and 25 kilometer. All courses will be marked and have been approved by the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park personnel. Please check out the details on www.Evergladesultras.com.

Race Director, Bob Becker, and his company UltraSports, LLC, are very supportive of the Park and the FOF, providing a link to the FOF website and prominently describing the mission and importance of our organization to the financial support of the Park several times on the website. In fact, appreciation of wild places and the opportunity to experience them in a unique and challenging way, with minimal impact to the environment is one of the most compelling reasons for the success of ultra running events.

This event provides increased visibility for the Fak to a national audience of people, not just the runners but also their families who often travel with them to races. A variety of activities, including FOF Swamp Walks will be offered and there is a segment of the website dedicated to activities available in the Fak. This is an exciting opportunity to spread the word about the extraordinary beauty and value of the Park, and gain support and new members for FOF.

Volunteer opportunities include a variety of activities on January 20, orientation day for the runners, and January 21, race day, including:

- Manning aid stations along the routes
- Finish line and awards support
- Checking in runners
- Assisting with orientation packets

Members of the medical community, nurses, doctors, and EMTs are encouraged to offer services on race day at the finish line and aid stations.

Volunteers can choose their shifts and activities on a first come, first served, basis. Simply go to the Volunteers page on the website address (www.Evergladesultras.com), scroll to the bottom and click on the Signup Here button.

Please join us for what promises to be an exciting and rewarding event in one of the best places to be on the planet!



See the insert to this issue to read a story about the trip to Honduras in search of bromeliad weevil parasites.

The Bromeliad Swamp

by Dennis Giardina

The Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park is known as “The Home of the Ghost Orchid,” and “The Orchid Swamp,” but it is also “The Bromeliad Swamp,” and fourteen species of bromeliads call Fakahatchee home. Our largest native bromeliads are endangered by an introduced parasite, *Metamasius callizona* the Mexican bromeliad weevil. These weevils were introduced to Florida sometime in the late 1980’s from an infested shipment of ornamental bromeliads and since then they have spread from shade houses and private collections to natural areas, devastating our once lush populations of native bromeliads.

Park Biologist Mike Owen and his crew have been monitoring an invasion of Mexican bromeliad weevils within the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park since 2007. They have set up several plots to document the weevil’s impact, including an extensive one along Janes Scenic Drive where all of the *Tillandsia utriculata* bromeliads (a very vulnerable species) visible from the road were mapped before there was any detectable decline. Currently they are recording in real time the obliteration of these bromeliads by weevils.

The only hope for Florida’s native bromeliads is a parasitic fly called *Lixadmontia franki*. The larvae of the fly (maggots), burrow into the larvae of the weevil (grubs) and kill them before they can pupate. Over the past four years, many hundreds of flies have been released in Fakahatchee and elsewhere but we don’t know if the flies are surviving in the wild. Because of that, Dr. Frank (UF), Tim Andrus (FSU) and I have gone on expeditions to Central America five times since 2005, looking for additional parasites of bromeliad weevils. This year Dr. Frank and I went to Honduras to assist his colleagues Dr. Cave and Dr. Cooper bring back as many parasitic flies as possible to fortify their breeding colony at the University of Florida’s Biological Control Laboratory in Ft. Pierce. More fly releases are scheduled for Fakahatchee this year and our fingers are crossed.



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

President's Message

We've all heard the expression that when it comes to the Fakahatchee, "we have more questions than answers." While often that may be true, some days the Fak answers those questions. Sunday, October 30th was such a day for me. Although I didn't realize it at the time, the answers started coming about 8:00 AM, as I was driving through the prairie above the ranger station. The goldenrod with its bursting yellow flowers highlighted against the browns and greens in the prairie, perfectly complimented the white and purple wildflowers also in bloom.

The high water resulting in sheet flow across Janes in numerous places was something I had never previously seen. I was amused to watch the juvenile ibis feeding in the water flowing across the drive. I left my jeep at Gate 12 and rode north on my bike. The wading birds were abundant. Blue herons, egrets and ibis filled the swamp. The hawks were too numerous to count and their flight over the drive in front of me was delightful to watch. A young turkey led me north from Gate 18 before disappearing to the west just before I reached the lake that has formed around Gate 19.

The ride back to my jeep was just as remarkable as the ride north had been. The tap, tap, tap of a pair of red-bellied woodpeckers caused me to pause and watch awhile. Sounds distant in the swamp, the causation of which is limited only by imagination, provided additional mystery to the ride. The resurrection fern was so green and healthy, it looked like it would never require the rebirth for which its name calls. If I needed to be summoned from my reverie, the gator laying in the grass a mere three feet from me when I saw him, provided the call as he exploded from rest into the water north of west slough.

The answers continued to come to me as I drove toward the ranger station. The small chicken turtle I moved from the roadway was a joy to find. The five foot diamondback rattler stretched across the drive a few miles north of the park office was frightened neither of me nor more surprisingly, my jeep. It provided the exclamation point to a terrific morning in the Fakahatchee.

So, what was the question answered by the Fak that Sunday morning? Well, that week I had been asking myself, "why do our volunteers spend so much valuable time working for the Fakahatchee?" Join us for a volunteer day and I believe you will find your answer. Read Dino's "Volunteer Corner" for more details and join us in the Park.

As always, feel free to contact me at lubelm@aol.com with your thoughts and comments. I hope to see you out there.

*See you in the swamp,
Howard Lubel*

The BOARDWALK REPORT will appear in our next issue. Welcome back to all the volunteers who greet visitors there.



Friends of Fakahatchee

"Welcome Back" Dinner with Nathaniel Reed

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, at 5:00 p.m.
Everglades Seafood Depot, Everglades City

Cost: \$25/member, \$35/guest

RSVP: (239) 695-2905 or FOF_90@hotmail.com
or BOOK ONLINE at www.orchidswamp.org
Deadline for replies is November 21.

Welcome Back Dinner/Talk with Nathaniel Reed

Join us at the "Welcome-Back Dinner" on **Saturday, December 3**, to hear Nathaniel Reed, one of Florida's outstanding conservationists, talk about "Where Have We Come From and Where Are We Going? The Victories and Heroes of the Past, the Contrast to Our Present State". His talk promises to be interesting and stimulating.

You can book the Dinner/Talk online at our website or print out a registration form to send with your check. **Please reply by November 21.** Cost is \$25 for members and \$35 for guests. For info, phone (239) 695-2905.



VOLUNTEER CORNER by Dino Barone



I will be working with Park Ranger Jeff Kneisley, endeavoring to make our volunteer work days this season a success for the park and, hopefully, a rewarding experience for those who are able to help us. Ideally, I will try to have the work scheduled in time for publication in *The Ghost Writer* each month so that potential volunteers can see what is planned. The next work days are:

Saturday, Nov 12, will be at the East River. This will include trimming, treating pepper, painting the trash can, removing cabbage palms (depends on equipment) and installing two benches.

Tuesday, Nov 15, will be the installation and painting of a new gate at the entrance of West Main and installation of a kiosk with some trimming.

Please be at the ranger station by 9:00 a.m. Our typical work day ends around 1:00 p.m.

If you have questions, contact me by email at sunnyg8tr@aol.com with the subject line "FOF Volunteer" so that I know it is not spam mail.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 314 paid memberships plus 10 in arrears. There are also 37 Introductory members. Renewal letters were sent with the October newsletter.

Welcome to new members since our last newsletter:

- Jeffrey Feldman, Miami
- Maureen Sullivan-Hartung, Naples

LUNCH & LEARN



Rookery Bay is holding a series of talks on the first Monday of the month. The schedule for the rest of 2011 is:

Dec 5: "Capturing Florida Panthers", Dennis Giardina
 The series continues in the new year until April. Cost is \$8 per person including lunch sponsored by Carrabba's and Costco. For info and to make reservations, phone (239) 417-6310 x401 or see www.rookerybay.org.



Collier Audubon

The group meets from November through April at 7:30 p.m. at the Naples Botanical Gardens. Next on the schedule:

- Nov 15: "The Coast in Motion", Ted Below
- Dec 6: Sandhill & Whopping Cranes", Marty Folk

For info, phone (239) 643-7822 or see their website www.collieraudubon.org and click on Programs.



Friends of Fakahatchee took part in the Florida Panther Festival in Naples on October 29 with a booth showing people what they might see in the preserve. FOF directors Glen Stacell, Tom Maish, and Howard Lubel talked to numerous visitors and handed out brochures. Seen above is Glen (right) with Don Finefrock, South Florida Parks Trust. Thanks to Tom Maish for the photo.

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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 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 _____
 STREET / P.O.BOX: _____

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MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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