



The Ghost Writer

NOVEMBER 2014

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

EVENTS

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!!!

for dates & costs, see
www.orchidswamp.org
and select Tours & Events

GHOST RIDER TRAM TOUR

starting Nov 1

MOONLIGHT TRAM TOUR

sold out until Feb 3

BIOLOGIST'S SWAMP WALK

starting Nov 7

BOARDWALK AFTER DARK

starting Nov 7

TRAM TOUR & WET WALK

starting Nov 13

COASTAL CRUISE

Dec 22 and March 21

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, November 9, 10:30 a.m.

Ranger Station, Copeland

WELCOME-BACK DINNER

Saturday, December 13, 5:00 p.m.

Port of the Islands, East Naples
reservations required

www.orchidswamp.org

Florida Panther Festival

Saturday, November 15, 10:00 a.m.

North Collier Regional Park
www.floridapantherfestival.com

Swamp Heritage Festival

Saturday, December 6, 10:00 a.m.

Big Cypress Swamp Welcome Center
www.nps.gov/bicy

EN PLEIN AIR

Join us on **Saturday, November 8**, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for Art-in-the-Preserve. We'll gather on the east side of the road at the **Harmon Shop**, the blue building at 15556 Janes Scenic Drive just north of park headquarters.

This area offers several possibilities for sketching. Lake Forrest is nearby (behind the building), and there is a shady spot with a view of a lovely gumbo limbo tree and the edge of the lake. There is also Lake Harmon across Janes Scenic Drive to the west.

Remember to bring old comfortable clothes and shoes (closed toes preferable) and your art supplies/tools, bag lunch, plenty of water, and a portable chair or something to sit on.

Karen Relish, Fakahatchee Park Ranger, can help with identification of some of the local flora and fauna. For information and to make a reservation, call Karen at 239-695-2886 or email Elizabeth Smith at lizardart@gmail.com.



New FOF Event!

See the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk in a whole new light in a naturalist-led adventure. The 2300-foot boardwalk is sheltered by bald cypress trees, many of them hundreds of years old. It ends at a gator pond, where the tour leader will check for the gleaming eyes of frogs and larger inhabitants. Along the way, the group may hear the cry of owls or the scurrying of raccoons and other nocturnal residents. Visit our website www.orchidswamp.org for dates and to reserve your places.

Big Cypress Birthday Bash & Swamp Heritage Festival

To celebrate 40 years since its establishment, Big Cypress National Preserve is holding a party on **Friday, December 5**, from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. at the Collier County Museum in East Naples. There will be food, drink, live music from JJ McCoy, and dancing. Tickets are \$75 and include a 2015 Clyde Butcher calendar. To book, visit <http://big40birthdaybash.eventbrite.com>. For history, see page 7.

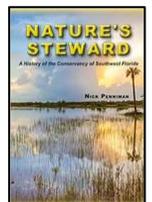


On the following day, **Saturday, December 6**, the 4th Swamp Heritage Festival will be held at the Big Cypress Swamp Welcome Center on the Tamiami Trail 2 miles east of SR-29 from 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The event includes storytelling, music, authors, artists, and special guest Clyde Butcher. There is no charge.

Conservationist Speaks at Welcome-Back Dinner

Nick Penniman, chair emeritus of The Conservancy of Southwest Florida among other prestigious positions he holds, will talk about his new book *Nature's Steward* (reviewed on page 7) at our dinner on **Saturday, December 13**, at Port of the Islands in East Naples.

The evening begins with a meet & greet at the cash bar and is followed by a delicious meal before the formal presentation. Reservations are required. See www.orchidswamp.org for tickets.



Visit www.orchidswamp.org for events, newsletters, glorious photos, and more.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 10/13/14, in the evening, Renee Rau, Park Manager, and Melissa Miano, Park Ranger, in the beginning of Janes Scenic Drive (JSD) observed 3 **Eastern Screech Owls** (Brown Phase). Later, off of JSD they observed 3 **Virginia Opossums** and 2 **Raccoons**, and off of SR-29 a **Cottonmouth** and a **Box Turtle**.

On 10/17/14, mid-morning, Michael Cullinan, observed a **Florida panther** and two young on JSD around Gate 15. *See photo below.* On 10/18/14, in the early morning, in the beginning of the drive, a visitor observed a **Merlin** perched in a Cypress Tree. *See photo below.* On 10/22/14, in the morning, they also noted a number of migratory birds along the drive including a **White-eyed Vireo**, **Common grackle**, **American crow**, **Red-winged blackbird**, **King rail** – several calling, one sighting, **Cardinal**, **Catbird**, **Great egret**, **Great blue heron**, **Ground dove**, **Little blue heron**, **Green-backed heron**, **Eastern phoebe**, **Mockingbird**, **Loggerhead-shrike**, **Belted King-fisher**, **Carolina wren**, **Prairie warbler**, **Blue-gray gnatcatcher**, **Palm warbler**, **Northern Parula**, **Yellow-rumped warbler**, **Common Yellowthroat**, **Oven bird**, **Northern water thrush**, **Red-eyed vireo**, **American red start**, **Black and white warbler**, **White ibis**, **Northern rough-winged swallow**, and a **Black-throated blue warbler**.

On 10/20/14, in the morning, Robert Fisher, volunteer, observed a **Spicebush Swallowtail butterfly** off of SR-29 and saw an **American Bittern** fly off to the North. On 10/21/14, in the early afternoon, a visitor observed a **Florida panther** near West Main.

If you want to report sightings, contact Park biologist Mike Owen or his assistant Karen Relish by phone at (239) 695-2886 or by email at FOF_90@hotmail.com

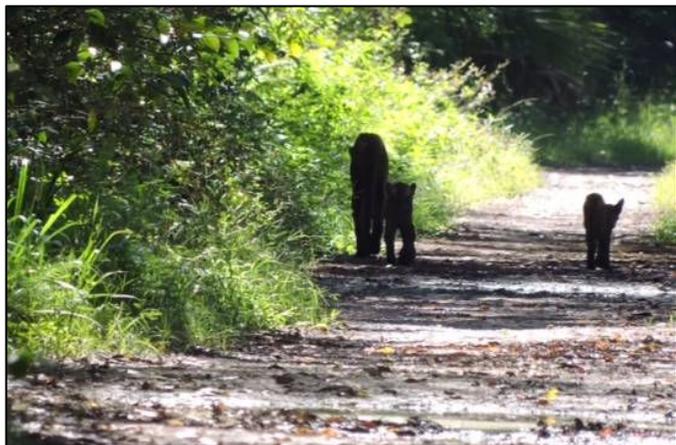


Photo of panthers on JSD by Mike Cullinan. See *MOZone*.



Photo of Merlin on JSD by Tom Trotta. See *MOZone*.

BUTTERFLY COUNT

by Karen Relish

Saturday, October 11, was the 17th Annual Fall Fakahatchee Butterfly Count. Fifteen people including Marc Minno, Butterfly Ecologist, and members of Broward County and Miami Blue Chapters of the North American Butterfly Association assisted in the Count in good weather. We documented butterflies including skippers at designated sites along Janes Scenic Drive. We noted over 15 different species and over 200 butterflies.



Photo of a male (whiter) and female (darker) Tropical Checkered Skipper by Marc Minno.

President's Message

by Francine Stevens

The month of October was dedicated to tying up loose ends in order to launch the coming **Interpretive Tours** season. It's not just a matter of pulling dates out of a calendar and posting them on the EventBrite reservation site – with all the best intentions in the world, the Tours cannot take place without volunteers to lead them and I thank all volunteers who signed up for the Tours. If you have time on your hands please consider helping with the Tours we can always use more volunteers; drivers and greeters are most welcomed. I assure you the learning curve is short and if you have interpretation skill or desire to learn please call me at 239-495-6744.

We also launched our new **Website** and have already received much positive feedback. This might seem like a small improvement to some but let me assure you that a professional Website serves more than what meets the eye. For example, our Web address is now on a new Tours sign that was installed at the Boardwalk recently (*see photo below*). Now when folks decide to look us up right in front of the sign they will be able to reserve a Tour before they even leave the Boardwalk. On October 22nd Patrick Higgins led the Naples Yacht Club on a Boardwalk tour (*see photo below*) and it was re-assuring to know that when he referred to our Website they found it to be a professional site reflecting their experience on the Boardwalk. The Naples Yacht Club visit story is already on the Website under "News". The new Website will be an

essential tool to promote FOF during our Capital campaign for the Boardwalk Expansion project; the feature to donate directly for the Boardwalk Expansion project is already functioning on the site and I couldn't resist being the first one to donate on the new site.

The **Boardwalk Vision** committee is working very diligently to select a firm who will develop a Master Interpretative Prospectus that will take from 6 to 8 months to come to fruition. The Prospectus will finally tell "The Story" in print with artist's renderings of what the Boardwalk experience will be. "The Story" as we call it will be FOF's tool to hold fundraising events so we can continue to help the Park move beyond the new parking area of Boardwalk Expansion project. "The Story" will be on the Website and I am sure you recognize, as the entire Board of Director does, that the Boardwalk Vision committee is devoting an enormous amount of time to this venture and again I encourage you to support of "The Story" by donating to the Boardwalk Expansion Fund. The reality of this project is no longer questionable – we expect to see the first shovel in the ground in 12 to 18 months!

Well, FOF volunteer duties are pulling me away from this letter; there is always more to say but I must move to the next item on my "FOF to do list".



President Francine was impressed at how quickly Ranger Steve Houseknecht installed the new sign at the Boardwalk. The sign was designed by Bruce Bunch, Communications chair.



Patrick Higgins, Chair of Education & Outreach, spoke to a group from the Naples Yacht Club at the Boardwalk. Photo thanks to Tom Maish.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Linda Koreny

So nice to be back on the Boardwalk. I marveled at the differences from when I left at the end of May; there is water in the strand and many of the **Bald Cypress** trees still have their leaves. I noticed a **Wood Stork** flying overhead, a **Chicken Turtle** in the borrow, a couple of **White Egrets**, a young **American Alligator** in the west pond by the picnic table and an adult could be seen through the **Alligator Flag** on the west side of the 'gator pond near the Turtle Sign. A couple of local frequent BCB visitors shared that they had observed both adult **Bald Eagles** in the nest and several people shared that they had heard them. I am looking forward to another interesting year watching the eaglets!

Fakahatchee Observation Notebook had this notation:

On 10/8/14, at 9:38AM, Mike Owen, Park Biologist observed a Sora Rail fly from the Marsh south side of US-41 just west of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk.

Sora Rail? Looking into this a bit more I learned that the Sora is the most common and widely distributed rail in North America. Its whinnying call is familiar to anyone who has watched birds in a marsh but it is seldom seen except by birders who wait patiently beside an opening in the reeds or who wade quietly through the cattails.

This small (8-10"), secretive quail-sized bird of freshwater marshes has a short yellow bill, gray breast, and black face; its upperparts are mottled brown, its lower abdomen is banded with black and white. These birds are especially numerous in fall and winter in southern marshes and rice fields, where they are primarily seed eaters. Although shot in large numbers every year, their high reproductive rate enables them to maintain a stable population. The greatest threat to the Sora is the destruction of the freshwater marshes where they breed: they have consequently become scarce in heavily populated areas.

Come soon and often to the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk; enjoy Wild Florida and remember to bring along your camera and binoculars!



Sora Rail photo by Stephen Parsons on www.allaboutbirds.org, the excellent Cornell Lab of Ornithology website.

EXPLORING EAST RIVER

by Tod Dahlke

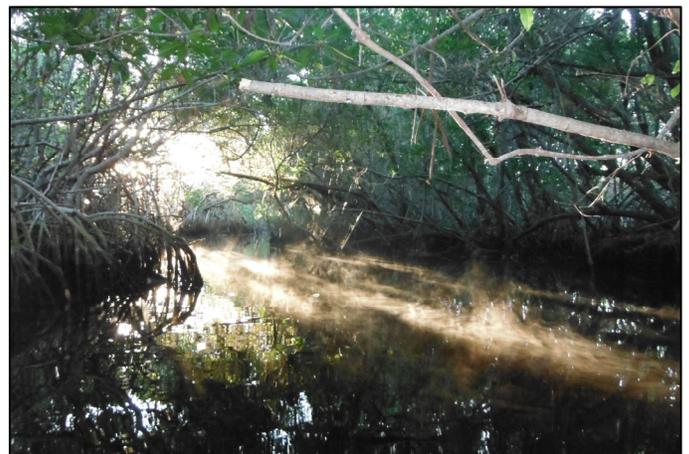
I am often on East River between US-41 and the islands which I affectionately refer to as "Fakahatchee South". I was born here in SW Florida but have been fortunate to travel around the world and I can tell you there's no place on Earth quite like The Fakahatchee Strand! I'm out here year round with my guests, friends, and family.

It's late October, the weather is starting to change and you can feel that Fall is in the air. The water is still high from our rainy summer and the alligators are able to hide just beyond the mangrove out of sight. The occasional bellowing back and forth is sometimes the only reminder that they're still close by. The White Pelicans have arrived and can occasionally be seen in great numbers flying in formation, obviously happy to be back in the Everglades again. Be assured that when the White Pelicans arrive it means our seasonal residents and visitors are right behind them; season has begun.

About 2 miles down river there's a tiny hidden tunnel entrance that seems to be guarded by the giant Banana & Fishing Spiders that lay in wait for their pray. They sit very still high overhead and at the water's edge like silent sentinels. The tunnel leads to a section of the mangrove forest with a high canopy. I call this special place "The Cathedral". You'll know you're there by the looks of things. The Yellow Helmet Orchids are finishing up their bloom with only the most robust plants still bearing flowers. I've been watching them for 5 years now nestled along an old Buttonwood Tree, surrounded by Spanish Moss and a variety of Bromeliads. They continue to thrive, providing enjoyment for all who are able to make it back to their little world.

Later this week I'll be taking the river through the entire stretch of Mangrove forest past Daniels Point to Fakahatchee Island. I love this trip because it's part kayaking, part exploring. I consider Fakahatchee Island to be the "sister island" to Chokoloskee Island, both being man-made islands during the height of the Calusa empire.

Tod Dahlke is an FOF member and also on the Board of the Everglades Society for Historic Preservation.



Unwelcome Aliens, Part 1. THE BURMESE PYTHON AND CLOSE RELATIVES

by Anthony (Tony) Marx



Seldom seen or heard of here in the 1900's, the menace suddenly leapt into the headlines earlier in this millennium when visitors photographed a fight to the death between a python and an alligator in the Everglades National Park, which went viral on [youtube](#). This was followed by photos of other such incidents. Then reports began filtering in from pet owners in Miami-Dade who were losing their domestic pets. In a 2013 incident complete with graphic photos, a 10ft African Rock python entered a South West Dade yard and strangled and killed a 60lb Husky in front of its horrified owner.

Sightings naturally occur at the edge of roads, not because that's where these animals like to hang out but because it's the most likely chance of spotting one on the move. When tightly curled or even stretched out in a woodland setting, their camouflage makes them hard to see.

The most-asked question is 'How dangerous are they to humans?' and the answer is – there have been no reports of anyone hurt or killed in the wild although there have been widely-publicized sad instances of children killed by escaped pet pythons.

Another obvious question is "Are there any around here in the Fakahatchee and are we likely to come across one?" The answer is that whereas you are almost guaranteed to see alligators, which by comparison are more lethal if people take chances but seldom injure anyone (you are much more likely to be injured in a traffic accident), only one confirmed python sighting has occurred in the Fakahatchee and a few more in the neighboring Picayune State Forest. Clusters of sightings have occurred in the canals alongside Tamiami Trail east and west of the State Road 29 intersection and several within the Marco Island and Naples urban areas.

The threat is not to humans as much as it is to our already endangered wildlife.

As news of sightings increased, the authorities and private organizations took notice and through surveys discovered startling facts:

1. Burmese Pythons are believed to number somewhere between 100-150,000, centered in south Florida but now appearing around Lake Okeechobee, with a colony near Jacksonville. There is also a known colony of African Rock Pythons breeding in southwest Dade. They all started from pets released or which escaped and found the south Florida climate similar to their native habitat.
2. Some on being dissected have been found to contain animals as large as a deer, and a couple with alligators! An Everglades ranger showed me a photo of a Burmese python which consumed a fully grown Greater Egret in broad daylight and full view, in front of the Flamingo ranger office.
3. Numbers of our once-common mammals have plummeted, with rabbits totally gone from some areas. The journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* revealed that between 2003 and 2011 mammal sightings 'severely declined.' Night time surveys along 35,400 miles of roads resulted in observations that raccoon sightings dropped by 99.3%, opossum 98.9% and bobcat 87%. White-tail deer were also down. Animal species declines are lower than where no pythons have been observed.

There have been no reports of the endangered Florida panther falling victim but as these creatures are known to prey on leopards in Asia, they are not immune.

HERE ARE SOME FACTS

Native Habitat. Found throughout Southern and Southeast Asia, Eastern India, and China and they are threatened and even protected in some areas.

Origins

- Towards the end of the 20th century, they established themselves as a breeding population in the Everglades.
- The first of these snakes was observed in Everglades National Park in 1979, but no more until 1995.
- In August 1992 Hurricane Andrew was deemed responsible for the destruction of a python breeding facility near Miami.
- Over 3000 sightings throughout the region have been logged in recent years, and they can be found in all areas of Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, and local parks and connecting highways.

FUTURE PROJECTIONS

By 2007, the Burmese python became established in Northern Florida. In February 2008, USGS scientists published a projected range map for the US, based on average climate data of the snake's home range and global warming projections, which predicted that by the end of the 21st century these snakes could migrate to and flourish in as much as a third of the continental United States, including all three coasts. There is a lot of argument over this because of climatic extremes but it is claimed that pythons can exist wherever alligators do.

This writer spent 20 years in Africa and is familiar with the African Rock python which, as its name implies, is an 'uplands' creature. As the Husky's owner discovered they are more aggressive than the Burmese Python and will strike with lightning speed to secure small prey before constricting, whereas the Burmese python approaches slowly and envelops its prey. However, as fellow Board Member Patrick Higgins and I discovered in 2013 while undergoing a Florida State course to catch pythons, Burmese pythons readily strike if cornered – captive pythons around 12ft in length were released and we had to chase down, cut off their retreat, and subdue them. Once cornered they would strike open-mouthed, which we were able to avoid by jumping aside as they reared back before striking. Their 5-inch-long needle-like teeth face inwards to prevent a limb being withdrawn and once embedded are seldom released unless the snake decides to escape.

They have light brown skin and dark red or brown blotches outlined in black, although python breeders have created several variations of patterns and colors – including albinism – that have been observed in the wild. Capable of climbing trees and swimming in salt water, they can remain submerged for up to 30 minutes; they have successfully made the 6-mile (9.7 km) swim to Key Largo over Florida Bay.

In spite of their apparent numbers, neither the Fakahatchee Park staff nor those of us who spend our spare time hiking and wading in this beautiful environment have ever encountered a python among the many snakes we see. So don't be discouraged, as it is unlikely you will see one. The longest Native American snakes grow to a maximum 6ft, so if you spot one longer than that – alive or dead – you will greatly help the wildlife authority if you note the time and place and call to the command center at 1-888-IVE-GOT1. For more information on these and a long list of other native invaders visit www.ivegot1.org

Tony Marx is a Florida Master Naturalist and F.O.F. Board Member. He is also a volunteer interpreter for the Fakahatchee guided tram tours and frequently contributes articles to The Ghost Writer.

Flying Rodents They Are Not

by Patrick Higgins

It was dark. Glen Stacell and I were rolling slowly down Janes Scenic Drive with lights dimmed in his pick-up truck. There was just the soft crunch of tires on gravel. The silhouettes of cabbage palms and cypress contrasted against the evening sky. Each of us had an arm out a side window holding a small black device aloft listening for clicks. We were reconnoitering our upcoming new moonlit tram tours and searching for some of Fakahatchee's bats.

Eight of Florida's 13 species of bat frequent the Fakahatchee; the Seminole bat (*Lasiurus seminolus*), Big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*), Brazilian free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*), Evening bat (*Nycticeius humeralis*), Eastern pipistrelle or Tricolored bat (*Pipistrellus subflavus*), Northern yellow bat (*Lasiurus intermedius*), Rafinesque's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus rafinesquii*) and the endangered Florida bonneted bat (*Eumops floridanus*). The Seminole bat, Northern yellow and pipistrelle are solitary roosters utilizing clumps of Spanish moss, dried palm fronds, and old tree cavities. The others are colonial roosters. The Brazilian free-tail and Big-eared have now adapted to man-made structures. The Brazilian likes bridges and picnic shelters, and is particularly partial to the crevices under barrel tile roofs, a penchant shared with bonneted bats. The Big-eared strays less far from its preferred forest habitat and is more likely to use old cabins and sheds. The evening bat is less picky and sometimes found in the folds of patio umbrellas. All are slow reproducers with typically a single pup born each spring.

Like all bats, they are the subjects of many misconceptions, even being referred to as flying rodents. Bats are in fact in an order all of their own, Chiroptera, from the Greek aptly meaning hand-wing, and may be closer related to primates than rodents.

They are a diverse group accounting for almost 20% of all known mammal species and can be divided into two suborders; the megabats or flying foxes of the old-world tropics, sometimes referred to as fruit bats, and the ubiquitous microbats which include all of Florida's species.

Our bats are small; ranging from our smallest, the Eastern pipistrelle with a 9" wingspan but weighing in at a mere ¼ oz, to our largest, the Florida bonneted bat with a 20" wingspan but still only about 1 ¼ oz weight. Despite their diminutive body mass, bats are extraordinarily long-lived. Some bats weighing less than an ounce have lifespans of 30 years.

Flying foxes in particular put paid to the myth 'as blind as a bat'. They have excellent binocular 3D color vision. But even the smaller eyes of our microbats have highly refractive lens and are densely packed with rods. They have good night vision but nobody goes around saying, "as sharp as a bat's eyes at night." Microbat eyesight is however made largely redundant by their ability to echolocate; to use reflected sound waves to map their environment in the same manner as dolphins. This remarkable sixth sense allows them to determine distance, size, shape, texture, speed, and direction.

Not only are bats not the harbingers of evil portrayed in horror films but they are highly beneficial, providing many important ecosystem services, not least of which in Florida is that our species are all insectivorous typically consuming their own body weight in insects every night. Depending on the size of the bat and size of the insect this can total several thousand 'bugs', many of which may be agricultural pests. In other parts of the world they provide pollination services as well.

As Glen and I proceeded our scanners periodically rippled to life, with the distinctive slower pulses of bats in the search mode, followed by increasingly frantic chirps as they closed on their targets, culminating in a feeding buzz which ends abruptly when the insect is

scooped by wing or tail membrane into its mouth. Occasionally we also picked up insect noise when it intruded into the bats' frequency range but this was a like a low muffled roar and easily distinguishable.

We think of nocturnal predators as being quiet, but bats are noisy, broadcasting at 110-120 decibels, which is the same level as standing next to a jackhammer. So it's a good thing that most of their calls are ultrasonic and well above 20 kHz, the upper limit of human hearing. It makes perfect sense being so loud if you're trying to resolve a moving object as small as a mosquito.

Our Swiss bat detectors are only the size of cigarette packs but quite sophisticated, as well as quite expensive, although I won't say quite how much in case my wife reads this. They automatically scan the full chiropteran echolocation frequency range, which varies by species. They then transform the chirp into our audible range, modulate its volume, and display its frequency. This provides a clue to identification but only a clue as the call ranges of many bats overlap. However, armed with this, and the knowledge of what bats are likely to be found in any given area, one can make a pretty good guess. Even more sophisticated bat scanners can record wave patterns that can be downloaded onto a computer for analysis and positive identification.

But this aerial combat is not all one sided. Many insects can detect the bats signals and take evasive actions or apply countermeasures. Some moths will fold their wings and suddenly drop to the ground. Tiger moths take a different tack. Their larvae feed on toxic plants that make them taste nasty so they emit a series of clicks to warn off an approaching bat.

Earlier in the day Glen had a sugared a few trees along our route with a homemade concoction of rum, molasses, and brown sugar. I would rather have drunk it, but he painted it on several trunks in the hope of attracting moths. The idea was to see what the bats might be feeding on. It worked well up north, but we didn't have any luck with it that night, so will revert to the time-honored tradition of a white sheet and backlight for our tours. We had better success with the fireflies and were able to attract a few towards us using a keychain LED flashlight, but you have to get the flash pattern just right for the particular species. We look forward to sharing our new skills with our moonlight tram riders and boardwalk-after-dark strollers.



Eastern pipistrelle, Fakahatchee's smallest bat. Photo by Dr. J Scott Altenbach.

Patrick Higgins, an FOF Board member, has been tromping around the Fakahatchee since 2004 and has helped with FOF Coastal Cruises and Ghost Rider tram tours as an expert interpreter.

Big Cypress Saved from Jetport

by Marya Repko

The Big Cypress is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year with a gala fundraiser (see page 1) before the Swamp Heritage Festival. But, how did this huge tract become a preserve?

When Ernest Coe was encouraging the federal government to create Everglades National Park, back in the 1920s and 1930s, he wanted to include the Big Cypress to ensure sufficient water flow into the glades. By the time the Park was established, private landowners had bought into the Big Cypress and it was excluded. Although Coe reluctantly attend the Park opening ceremony by President Harry S Truman in 1947, he feared for the future.

Twenty years later in 1968 the Dade County Port Authority decided that Miami needed a new airport and planned a massive supersonic Jetport, the largest in the country. There would be a high-speed rail link and multi-lane highway to the new site where a city would be built to accommodate workers and travelers.

The location they selected was in the Big Cypress, close to 50-mile bend off the Tamiami Trail, just down the road from what is now the Oasis Visitor Center. The Authority bought 39 square miles, started clearing the land, and constructed a training runway.

Environmentalists became concerned and met with the Authority but could get no answers about the impact the development would have on the ecology. They approached the Secretaries of Transportation and of the Interior with their concerns. In September 1969, the influential report *Environmental Impact of the Big Cypress Swamp Jetport* by Luna Leopold, Art Marshall, and others was issued. It warned about air pollution, animals on the runway, birds colliding with planes, and the constant noise.

In January 1970 the Authority agreed to stop building. President Richard Nixon had been made aware of the situation and, fearing other development in the Big Cypress, proposed that the federal government buy 547,000 acres of the swamp. Legislation creating Big Cypress National Preserve was passed in October 1974. Further land has been added since then.



Aerial view of the Training & Transition Airport which is all that was built at the proposed Big Cypress Swamp Jetport. If you drive up the approach road off the Tamiami Trail near 50-Mile Bend, you will find this fence and sign.

Between the Leaves

reviewed by Marya Repko

NATURE'S STEWARD; A History of the Conservancy of Southwest Florida by Nick Penniman

Nick Penniman has written a serious history of conservation in Collier County, starting with Rookery Bay and covering the Fakahatchee, Big Cypress, South Golden Gate Estates, and Keewaydin.

The impetus for this book was the discovery of old records at the Conservancy office. The author writes that "the Conservancy was part of a larger story, a microcosm of the battles being fought and won in Tallahassee and Washington to overcome excesses and unintended consequences created by America's great industrial expansion ... The Conservancy's coming into its fullness at the peak of the environmental revolution of the 1970s became the heart of the story."

After defeating the plan for the "Road to Nowhere" through the barrier islands that border Rookery Bay in 1964, a group of concerned citizens founded the Collier County Conservancy to preserve that area. Success with this project led to further intervention to save environmentally-sensitive lands.

As government agencies began acquiring endangered acreage for the public, the Conservancy looked at long-term growth management. The demands of development for the surging Florida population put southwest Florida at risk. He writes "Nature's drainage system is the most important recharge mechanism for potable water ... While the City of Naples was concerned about its wells, Collier County was dealing with the escalating expense of constantly fighting fires on dried-out land."

The author tracks the growth of the Conservancy and its merger in 1976 with the Big Cypress Nature Center which focused on education and wildlife rehabilitation and complimented the Conservancy's expertise in science and fundraising. He explains that teaching the general public, especially children, about nature is vital in influencing policy. The new organization acquired land and built a campus, thanks to donations from wealthy private people and other groups. With expansion came a change in operations from volunteers to paid professional management.

This important and well-researched book includes copious footnotes, a list of further reading, and a thorough index. It is available at Collier County Public Library or from the publisher Pineapple Press.

Nick Penniman is the keynote speaker at the FOF Welcome-Back Dinner on December 13. See details on the front page of this newsletter.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 301 paid-up memberships in these categories:

Individual	94	Family	128
Supporter	25	Patron	35
Benefactor	2	Lifetime	10
Business	7		

Welcome to new members since our last newsletter:

- Rita Bleasdale, Naples
- Norman Kanwisher, Marietta, GA
- Donald Tilton, Newaygo, MI
- Patty & Jack Wettstein, Sanibel

NEW LIFETIME MEMBER

Thanks to Rita Bleasdale for joining as a Lifetime Individual member and for jumping in right away to volunteer on the Boardwalk Vision committee.

And, as a Lifetime member, she will not have to worry about renewal notices and reminders!



The new FOF website www.orchidswamp.org is live! You will find all the back issues of *The Ghost Writer* as well as news reports, an interactive calendar of events, links to EventBrite for reservations, membership renewal, contact information, and much more – plus some wonderful photos. **Read more about the website in the President's Message on page 3.**

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.**, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation Citizen Support Organization, provides financial and volunteer support to preserve the unique ecology and cultural heritage of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and to educate the public about its importance. The Fakahatchee is 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 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 400 copies.

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