



The Ghost Writer

DECEMBER, 2010

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Sat, 4th Tues

Cost: \$50 or \$60 depending on length of walk, \$15 child (\$10 discount for members)

Reservations Required.
Phone (239) 695-1023

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

1st Saturday

Cost \$50 (\$40 for members),
Reservations Required.
Phone (239) 695-1023

GUIDED BOARDWALK TOUR

2nd Sat: Dec 11, Jan 8

Cost \$15 (\$10 for members)
Reservations Required.
Phone (239) 695-1023

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2nd Saturday, 3rd Tuesday

Sat, Dec 11 Tues, Dec 21
Phone Alicia at (239) 695-4593

BOARD MEETING

December 12 at 2:00 p.m.
Port of the Islands

2010-2011 SEASON

Dec 12: Welcome Back Dinner
Jan 22: Coastal Cruise
Feb 26: Fakahatchee SAFARI
March 27: Family Day Picnic
April 10: Annual Dinner

See page 4 for details of the
Welcome-Back Dinner/Talk
on Sunday, December 12.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 10/24/10, Mike Cullinan, visitor, had a good trip on Janes Scenic Drive at 8AM when he saw a **bobcat** in his rearview mirror after passing Gate 2 and was able to watch him through his binoculars for 5 minutes. He noted another car behind him was able to see it as well. At 10:38AM, he saw a **Florida Panther** around Gate 16 and at 12PM, he saw a 20-inch **cottonmouth** on the drive. On 10/25/10, Alicia Campanella, Park Ranger, saw a **Black bear** crossing SR-29 and jump over a guardrail into the Barron River Canal.

On 10/28/10, at the beginning of Janes Scenic Drive (JSD), Rick Cruz and Julie Cardenas, volunteers, observed a **Black Crowned Night Heron** and a **Limpkin** and later in the day a 300-pound **Black Bear** eating alligator flag at the end of Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. On US-41 about 5 miles west of SR-29, they saw a large adult **Bald Eagle** swoop down to a dead Little Blue Heron. On 10/28/10, early morning, Mike Owen, Park Biologist, observed a **Roseate Spoonbill** fly over north to south over the headquarters area. On 10/29/10, Julie Cardenas heard a **wild boar** while kayaking through the East River mangrove tunnels.

On 11/11/10, Mike Owen observed an **American Bittern** just before Gate 12, East Main flying to the east and then to the north. On 11/12/10, Renee Rau, Park Manager, observed a **Ring-necked Duck** on the pond just west of Park Headquarters. On 11/13/10, Karen Relish, OPS Park Ranger, observed a **River Otter** crossing JSD just past Gate 12, going east then returning back to the west. On 11/13/10, around 10:30AM, Kathy Hatch, Dick & Edite Hughes, and Betty Gauthier, all volunteers, observed over 30 **Wood storks** circling with about the same number of **Black Vultures** above the Park headquarters. On 11/13/10, around 3:30PM, Mike Cullinan observed a small young **Black bear** with a white marking on the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk.

On 11/15/10, Renee Rau and Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, observed along JSD a male **Snail Kite** over the marl prairie, at mid-drive they saw a **Black bear**, and at the end of the drive an **Eastern Indigo snake**. On 11/14/10 at 5:12PM, Rose Flynn and Howard Lubel, FOF members, saw two **Florida panthers** on JSD about 1/2 mile north of gate 16. One sat and watched them for a couple of minutes while the other crossed the drive. Both of the panthers disappeared into the brush on the east side of the drive. On 11/16/10, at approximately noon, Howard saw a **River otter** in the brush on the east side of JSD approximately one mile north of gate 7.

On 11/16/10, Jim Hiatt, Park Ranger at Koreshan Historic Site, while taking a swamp walk, heard three **American crows** calling, observed a **Great Egret** as well as noted two Sabal palmettos that had been ripped open by a bear. On 11/24/10, Dick & Edite Hughes observed a roadkill **River Otter** on US-41 east-bound lane near the East River Canoe Launch area. Be aware they are really on the move this time of year. On the same day Karen Relish noted a **Double-crested Cormorant** swallowing a fish while swimming in the pond next to headquarters.

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.

The Trouble with Tegus

by Dennis Giardina



In April of 2009, a Miami-Dade County biologist took pictures of a big lizard on a long, dirt road in Florida City where my colleague Tony Pernas and I saw one in late 2008. The photos were clear enough to determine that it was a tegu (*tay-goo*), a large South American lizard species. Not long before, another biologist reported the capture of a tegu from a roadside hammock in Everglades National Park. In July of 2009, Tony and I assisted with prescribed burns on a couple of remnant pine rockland sites in Homestead. These fragments of highly-endangered pineland are mostly surrounded by urban and agricultural areas and periodic controlled burning is critical to maintain their floristic diversity. Animals disturbed by the fire often move out into the open and we were interested to see if the fire would produce a sighting of a tegu. When the first day's burn was finished, Tony and I took a drive down the dirt road where the tegu was photographed. Near the end, we observed two large lizards, basking in a patch of late afternoon sun. One retreated into the roadside rocks and vegetation but one remained long enough to be photographed and identified as an Argentine black and white tegu (*Tupinambis merrianae*), the largest and most temperate species of the genus. Black and white tegus commonly reach

lengths of over three feet. They are a largely carnivorous, terrestrial species that is similar-looking but not related to the monitor lizards of Africa, Asia, and Australia. They are very popular in the pet trade.

As we searched the roadside, a plant nursery owner approached us and asked us if we were there looking for the big lizards?! She said that she'd seen them digging around her nursery and that a nest must have hatched recently because the other day she saw many little ones around her potted plants. She mentioned that her dogs killed one and then led us to the carcass of a juvenile Argentine black and white tegu which we collected. These events propelled an official rapid response to tegus in Miami-Dade County and over the past year my colleagues and I have made a lot of progress in terms of understanding this feisty new invasive species, the tegu lizard. We have implemented a live trapping effort from Florida City to Everglades National Park, later we expanded it across the South Dade Wetlands to the US-1, C-111 canal intersection. We've made extensive surveys by foot, vehicle, and by setting out trail cameras. We've done a laboratory analysis of the gut contents of collected tegus and we've launched a radio telemetry study by implanting radio transmitters into five adult tegus, tracking them regularly and mapping their movements

Over the past year, we have determined that Argentine black and white tegus have spread across a 30 square mile area. Eradication seems unlikely. It does seem likely that tegus will spread across Southeastern Miami-Dade County to Biscayne and Florida Bays. Ground nesting birds and reptiles, Key Largo and its rare native rodents may be threatened by tegus. Will they eventually spread north to US-41 and west, to occupy the Big Cypress and Fakahatchee Strand Preserve? There is another tegu population established in West Central Florida. To see the slide show I gave at the 2010 Everglades Invasive Species Summit about Nile Monitor and tegu lizards, go to www.evergladescisma.org/summit10/Lizards.pdf.

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.

Rookery Bay Festival

The Southwest Florida Nature Festival will be held in 2011 on **January 14-16** at Rookery Bay in East Naples. To learn more about the many events in the program about native wildlife, see www.rookerybay.org or phone (239) 417-6310.



ANNUAL BIRD COUNT

If you would like to help with the Christmas Bird Count in the Naples area, phone Collier Audubon at (239) 643-7822 or contact a-jonas@illinois.edu.

Butterflies Of The Big Cypress

A photo display entitled "Wings of Wonder" is being exhibited at the Big Cypress Swamp Welcome Center and the Oasis Visitor Center, both on the Tamiami Trail, courtesy of the Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association. There will be special programs at the centers on **Saturday, December 11**, at 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. For info, phone (239) 695-1201.

FOF Board Member Saul Friess from Miami emailed:
The most dangerous part of the Fakahatchee is driving there ...

President's Message

It is such a pleasure working with the dedicated, can-do people of the Friends of Fakahatchee! So many good programs are happening in the Park lead by our Volunteers

John Elting assisted by PJ Marinelli; Bill Mesce, and Mike Owen have started up the Swamp Walks. Water is about the right depth and is still warm. Come join us! The beauty of the Fakahatchee is most evident in the multi-shades of green punctuated by the discovery of a colorful Orchid or Bromeliad in bloom.

The Boardwalk continues to be our "Window to the Fakahatchee". With an estimated 100,000 Visitors per year it is the most visited destination in the Strand! This season our Boardwalk Stewards; Caryl and Nelson Tilden will be conducting guided Boardwalk Tours on December 11 and January 8. Join them for an intimate walk that makes the Boardwalk so appealing.

Did you know that there is a Fakahatchee ISLAND? Neither did we until John & Nancy Elting and Judy & I first visited the Island a few years back and thought a program there would be interesting. Settled in the late 1800's by early Florida pioneers, the Island contains remnants of the home site and a cemetery. This unique area with some rare flora can be visited on our Fakahatchee Coastal Cruise. Organized by Marya Repko with Naturalists Dennis Giardina or Glen Stacell providing commentary, you will most likely see dolphins; bird rookeries interesting plants and maybe a gorgeous sunset on the way back to port.

Mark your calendar for Saturday, February 26 for the 2nd Annual Fakahatchee SAFARI. Chairs Elsa Caldwell, Glen Stacell, Jay Staton, and your Prez have expanded the program with additional and varied SAFARI Camp activities while retaining the popular Bird and Photo Expeditions, swamp walks, hikes, narrated tram tours, and the swamp buggy rides ending with a delicious BBQ Cookout with wine and music. Capping the evening will be the bonfire and storytelling! Experience first-hand the beauty of the REAL FLORIDA that we all love and want to protect. The Fakahatchee SAFARI is not just an event. It is an EXPERIENCE!!

Our Welcome Back Dinner is slated 5:00 p.m. Sunday, December 12, at Port of the Islands. Glen Stacell will be speaking. Come enjoy and meet your Fakahatchee friends at this popular dinner that kicks off the season.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU to the many members who contributed to the \$40,000-plus that was raised for the Boardwalk Facility Development. These funds are deposited into a separate, interest-bearing account awaiting the start of the Development. Deputy Secretary of the EPA, Bob Ballard personally called the Friends after this Campaign and stated that the Boardwalk is a "top priority" for the Park Service.

Presently there are plans being prepared for the Friends review. Unfortunately the change in the Administration has stalled progress at this time. When new leadership is announced the Friends will resume our work with the Park Service to get the plan and permitting process underway.

We hope to see you at the Welcome Back Dinner!

Tom Maish

BOARDWALK REPORT

The number of visitors at the Boardwalk has increased greatly during the month of November. The weather has been conducive for a leisurely walk all the way to the gator hole and a peaceful rest on a bench at the end. The reverberating sound of pileated woodpeckers is always a treat out there and sometimes the answered calls of barred owls can be heard. Both of our adult alligators have been seen several times a week but there is no sign of juveniles. Perhaps the water is still a little too deep for sunning on the edges.

We have black crowned night herons (both young and adult) visiting the pond pretty regularly. Many visitors have not seen this bird before so they are photographed often. We also have egrets, ibis, anhingas, and great blue herons stopping by. The bees continue to buzz around their colony in the bald cypress directly opposite the observation deck. Fortunately the hive does not seem to be growing any larger this year, so they probably won't be running us off after all!

Mike Owen reported to us that a black bear has been seen several times around, and even walking on, the Boardwalk. The bear does not appear to be agitated by visitors, but a healthy respect and plenty of distance is certainly recommended. We have observed a mother and a juvenile around the alligator hole for the last couple of seasons so it appears that we are sharing territory.

Faithful volunteers Edite and Dick Hughes have hand-swept the entire boardwalk in an effort to not disturb the eagles and our visitors with loud noises. That's a big job and we are very grateful. One visitor said, "I have two words for you: 'leaf blower'!" Another said, "Thank you for not disturbing the wild life." It is always interesting to hear the different perspectives about this unique swamp forest. It does provide an opportunity to suggest another way of viewing the picture. And what a picture it is. We are also grateful for the interpretive skills of Kathy Hatch who is volunteering again this season. She is very knowledgeable and an asset to the boardwalk and the Friends of the Fakahatchee.

For those of you who follow the progress of our bald eagles, they have been sighted many times since the early part of November. Most recently they have been observed carrying sticks to the nest. We hope it's another year of eagle chick watching. It is a real favorite of visitors.

We look forward to seeing you on the Boardwalk.

Caryl Tilden, Boardwalk volunteer

SAFARI SPONSORS WANTED

The planning team for our signature event, The Fakahatchee SAFARI on February 26, is looking for sponsors at various levels from \$1,500 through \$10,000 with commensurate benefits. All will be recognized in our media coverage and be invited to join in the fun on the day. For info, see www.orchidswamp.org and visit the Events Schedule page.

If you know of a corporation, foundation, or other organization that might like to take part as a sponsor, please contact our president Tom Maish at (239) 992-5963 or (614) 361-9494.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 297 fully-paid memberships plus 6 lapsed members who are being sent final notices and 22 Introductory members.

The Ghost Writer is emailed to 293 members, saving almost \$129 per issue in postage costs plus printing.

Welcome to new members:

- Lynn Foster, Naples
- Jay & Sheryl Lamb, Sarasota
- Mr & Mrs Laurence Rau, Daytona Beach
- Fay Reynolds, Naples
- Jim & Bobbi Winger, Naples

NEW SECRETARY

Thanks to Howard Lubel, FOF board member from Miami, who has volunteered to be secretary for our organization.

BOARDWALK EXPANSION

The total Boardwalk Fund as of December 1 was \$40,258 contributed by 148 members, plus a few non-members.

Thanks to everyone for supporting this project! Even small amounts are a vote of confidence.



Thanks to member Dino Barone for this photo of woodstork at the corner of US-41 & SR-29 in early November. He estimates that there was a flock of at least 100 birds on the ground and in the air.

Welcome-Back Dinner/Talk

Our first members' event of the season will be on **Sunday, December 12**, when we can catch up with each other after the summer and listen to an informative speaker over dinner at Port of the Islands (US-41 about 10 miles west of SR-29). The evening starts at 5:00 p.m. with a wine reception which is followed by a 3-course sit-down meal. The cost is \$20 for members, \$25 for guests who can join FOF that evening.

FOF Director Glen Stacell will give an illustrated presentation about "Unusual Encounters in the Fakahatchee". Glen was a biology teacher and is the author of the book *A Guide to Native Wildflowers in Southwest Florida* which will be on sale during the evening.

For info and to reserve your places, phone (239) 695-2905 or see our website www.orchidswamp.org where you can pay in advance with a credit card.

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 – Tom Maish	Vice-President – Dennis Giardina				
	Secretary – Howard Lubel	Treasurer – Saul Friess				
BOARD:	Allen Caldwell	Elsa Caldwell	Julia Cardenas	Frank Denninger	Saul Friess	Dennis Giardina
	Cindy Hackney	Howard Lubel	Tom Maish	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)

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