



The Ghost Writer

JANUARY, 2009

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturday

Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child
Reservations Required.

Phone (239) 695-1023 or email
islandgirm@msn.com

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

Jan 17, Feb 14, March 21, April 18

Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child
Reservations Required.

Phone (239) 695-1023 or email
islandgirm@msn.com

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

Tues, Jan 20

Sat, Feb 14 Tues, Feb 17

Sat, Mar 14 Tues, Mar 17

Sat, Apr 11 Tues, Apr 21

For info, phone (239) 695-1023.

FOF BOARD MEETING

Sunday, February 15, at 9:00 a.m.

Big Cypress Preserve Pavilion
Members Welcome!

NOMINATIONS DEADLINE

Wednesday, February 18

See article on page 3.

AMAZING ADVENTURES

Friday, February 6, at 6:30 p.m.

Rookery Bay, Naples

"Panthers in the Amazon"

by Marty Main

See article on page 2.

It's a busy time of year ... see the large list of Outside Events on the enclosed Calendar which you can also download from our website.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

Chicken turtles have been seen along Janes Scenic Drive by volunteers Laura Skinner, Donna Glann-Smyth, Ron Kotliar, Kathy Hatch, Richard Fagan, Pat Weber, Greg Greer Naturalist, Mike Owen Park Biologist, and Karen Relish OPS Ranger. Over their breeding season, Ron Kotliar has been documenting their presence along the drive. According to kids.yahoo.com, the chicken turtle gets its name from its extremely long neck that looks to some like a chicken's neck. In addition, it has a pattern of fine lines on a tan-to-olive shell.

On 12/4/08, volunteer Bill Paquin observed a **Florida snapping turtle** off Janes Scenic Drive with a green algae carapace. On 12/8/08, Pat Weber observed two **wood storks** near Prairie Canal. On 12/9/08, Renee Rau, Park Manager, and Alicia Mumford, Park Ranger who joined the Fak on January 5, 2009, collected a road-kill **Eastern diamondback rattlesnake** along SR29. On 12/9/08, Greg Greer and Wendell Vaught, Naturalist, saw a **Cooper's hawk** flying over Janes Scenic Drive. On 12/9/08, Greg Greer and Mike Owen saw a **Yellow rat snake** and a **Florida red-belly turtle** on Janes. They also saw an **immature female Cooper's hawk** circling over the park office.

On 12/9/08, Greg Greer and Wendell Vaught saw a **Peninsula ribbon snake** off of Janes. On 12/10/08 in the early afternoon, Renee Rau observed a **bobcat** near Gate 16. On 12/16/08 in the morning, volunteers Rick Cruz, Joe Weber, and Nelson Tilden observed an **Everglades mink** around Gate 4. On 12/16/08 in the early afternoon volunteer Mike Starke saw a 6.5 foot **alligator** off of East Main. On 12/19/08, David Moore, FPP, observed an **Eastern diamondback rattlesnake** about 5.5 feet long north of Jones Grade.

On 12/22/08, Richard Fagan while cleaning along Janes Scenic Drive observed a 6.5 foot long **Red-tailed boa constrictor** as well as its shed. It was captured with the assistance of Dr. George Wilder and taken to the Naples Zoo. On 12/26/08, a brown and tan **wild boar** about 80-100 pounds was seen off the entrance to Janes Scenic Drive by Pat and Joe Weber. On 12/30/08, a **Florida panther** was observed by a visitor from California on JSD around late afternoon. On 1/2/09, Ron Kotliar and Richard Fagan, while doing a giant bromeliad survey along the drive, observed a **bobcat**, **Florida snapping turtle**, **Florida cottonmouth**, and **Florida chicken turtle** as well as 2 **killdeer**. On 1/3/09, Ron Kotliar and Karen Relish, observed 8 **Double-Crested cormorants**, 6 **black vultures**, one **wood stork** fly over as well as a **Northern flicker** seen in the cypress trees around Harmon's lake.

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

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 275 members. Renewal notices were sent out for the first quarter of 2009. Thanks to everyone who replied promptly!

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DAY, Florida Park Service District 4, will be held on **Saturday, February 21**, at Koreshan State Park. **RSVP to Terrance Craig at (239) 695-4593 by Wednesday, January 21.**

The ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC will be on **Sunday, March 1.**

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

The Fakahatchee of South America

by Dennis Giardina



On Friday night, **February 6**, at the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center, Marty Main will talk and present a slide show on his research in the Mamiraua Sustainable Development Reserve in the Brazilian Amazon. The Reserve was created to provide a livelihood for the people that live around it while protecting the aquatic and forest resources from over exploitation. Mamiraua has zones for ecotourism, timber extraction, agriculture, fishing, and hunting with core areas that are off limits to resource extraction but where research is allowed. Marty and his doctoral student Emiliano Ramalho conduct theirs in one of these protected areas from a top a floating lodge and laboratory half way up a long oxbow lake. Even fishing is prohibited in this lake and it provides a refuge and nursery for important commercial fish species like the piraracu, the largest freshwater fish in the world.

The floating lodge is made out of rough sawn lumber, screen and sheet metal. It's built on top of and buoyed by a raft of enormous tree trunks that can float for up to 30 years. A varzea, or seasonally flooded riverine forest, surrounds the lake and giant trees a hundred feet high or more tower above its banks. I got a chance to be a part of Marty and Emiliano's crew for a couple of weeks this fall and while I was there, I noticed similarities between Mamiraua and Fakahatchee. In Fakahatchee, our seasonally flooded forests see about a three foot water level rise during the rainy season; in the varzea, the water level can rise and fall up to fifty feet. Mamiraua's seasonal high water peak is in June. Technical difficulties delayed our arrival almost two months to early October when water levels were a month away from their seasonal low. We expected to be there during the last two weeks of August when the flood waters are receding rapidly, pouring out of the varzea into lakes and rivers and the forest floor emerges from months of

inundation. At that time, terrestrial animals move back into the Reserve, following the spreading dry land, including the one species we were there to study, *Panthera onca*, the jaguar.

Not much is known about the ecology of jaguars in the flood forests of the deep Amazon. Emiliano did a camera trap study in Mamiraua for his Masters Degree. Based upon the pictures he took of jaguars visiting his bait stations, he was able to determine two interesting things: a lot of jaguars move into the forest in the low water season and the majority of them are female. Jaguars are the most catholic of all the big cats in terms of their diet. Over most of their range they prefer to prey upon large warm-blooded animals but they are less specialized than our panthers and the list of species that jaguars are known to eat is long. In the Mamiraua Reserve their primary prey is spectacled caimans, a species of crocodile and large fish that get trapped in pools in the drying forest. Jaguars have the strongest jaws of all the big cats and they kill caimans by biting through their heads, (they can even crush turtle shells). After two years of camera trapping, the next step was to catch jaguars and put GPS collars on them to follow their movements over the course of a year. Marty has a very interesting story to tell with lots of great photos and I hope to see you all there.

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.

For more information about the Amazing Adventures series, see www.rookerybay.com or phone (239) 417-6310.



Immature Tiger Heron

President's Message

Two of our major Goals this season were to:

- Schedule two Volunteer Work Days each month, and
- Increase Volunteer participation.

The Volunteer participation has exceeded our expectation! Up to 15 Volunteers have helped on each Work Day. What has been accomplished really benefits the Park and our Volunteers.

The Boardwalk was prepared early in the season and maintenance is on schedule.

Janes' Scenic Drive has been filled and graded by volunteer Joe Weber and his crew. Almost all of the culvert areas along Janes' Scenic have been cut back and cleared of debris to promote "Kodak Moments" of the Fakahatchee for our drive by Visitors

This work by the Volunteers consists of cleaning-up projects that were deferred because of lack of Park staff. We still have a plethora of projects. If you would like to "get up close and personal" with the Fak, come on out on the 2nd Saturday or 3rd Tuesday.

Call Pam at (239) 695-1023 to register for a Volunteer Workday or just come on out.

See you in the Swamp ...

Tom Maish

DEADLINE FOR CANDIDATES

Nominations are now being sought to fill positions on the FOF Board of Directors. The Board meets monthly during Oct. through April, sponsors events, raises money and works to improve the Fakahatchee Preserve.

A nominee must be a member at least 18, verify a willingness to actively participate during a two-year term, and be prepared to submit a brief statement of background, interests and qualifications. Even if the nominee has not performed volunteer work hours, he or she can be considered for a waiver of this requirement.

ALL interested members are encouraged to apply. Please do not nominate anyone that has not agreed to serve.

If you are willing to serve, or know a member that is, please send your nomination (including yourself, if interested), with: your name, and the nominee's name, address, phone, email, and any other contact information, to: friendsoffakahatchee@hotmail.com, or mail to Jim Woodard at 17001 SW 90 Ave., Palmetto Bay, FL 33157, **no later than February 18**. All nominations must be in writing, but questions can be addressed to Jim at (305) 856-4559.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson & Caryl Tilden
Volunteer Naturalists

This has been a month of increasing activity, both in terms of visitors and wildlife. The Christmas holidays saw large numbers of people enjoying the Boardwalk. As we have reported before, many visitors are coming from other countries and one had a guidebook printed in German listing the Fakahatchee as a "must see" destination.

Our bald eagle pair has been observed on a daily basis. Many visitors have been able to witness the eagles exchange places on the nest after one of them had brought in food. The side of the nest facing the Boardwalk saw some "remodeling" this year. The eagles added several new branches, making the nest taller. With the added height, only the top of an adult eagle's head is seen most of the time. It is likely that by the middle of February one or more chicks will become visible as they begin to grow larger.

With the water levels dropping in typical winter fashion, more wading birds are coming to the gator pond. One interesting sight has been two black-crowned night heron adults and an immature one. Other daily appearances have been made by great blue herons, great egrets, ibis, green herons, anhingas, kingfishers and a few wood storks. The gator pond has seen only rare appearances by the larger of the two female alligators which usually inhabit the area. We have only seen about six newborn alligators this Fall, but several immature ones from prior years are commonly seen.

Last winter we reported seeing a red shouldered hawk attack and eat an eastern mud snake. Last week many visitors got to observe an eastern mud snake eating a Greater Siren salamander, which appeared to be over a foot in length and seemingly as big around as the snake itself. Eating the salamander was an hour and a half process. A red-shouldered hawk sat on a nearby limb for nearly an hour, apparently waiting for everyone to leave, but when that did not happen, the hawk gave up and left.

We have had beautiful displays of resurrection ferns following some of the recent rains. The leaves are off most of the bald cypress trees, which makes seeing back into the swamp somewhat easier. This is a good time to observe the nearly 80 royal palm trees which are visible from the Boardwalk, including some young ones that have been observed for the first time this year.

We welcome you to visit and experience this special part of the Fakahatchee.

FIELD STUDY OF HAND FERN (*CHEIROGLOSSA PALMATA*)

by Jack Berninger

The Hand Fern is an endangered species found in the Fak. Elaine and I have been conducting a population count and poison ivy presence along a 1000 meter section of a tram off of Janes Scenic Drive.

The past five years have shown the following population counts of *Cheiroglossa* along this tram. All counts were conducted the first week of January. All the hand ferns were found on Sabal Palm (*Sabal palmetto*) trees.

	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>
count	20	17	11	19	35

As you can see, there was a substantial increase in total numbers. This increase is a good indicator of the environmental factors effecting the fern life cycle in this area of the park.

Poison Ivy may be a limiting factor. The ivy is found on most of the Sabal Palms but was not growing on 27 of the trees with the ferns. The other eight trees had some ivy. Another observation was that if *Phlebodium aureum* was growing on the trees there were no hand ferns, with one exception.

The right side N.E. walking in on the tram, from Janes, had 14 ferns while the opposite side had 21 ferns. This is consistent with the past four years. Twenty of the Hand Ferns on the left side of the tram, entering from Janes, averaged 1.7 meters above the ground while one was 6 meters high. On the Right side the average height for all 14 ferns was 1.23 meters.

This is the fourth year I have been monitoring age of the ferns and all are at least four years old.

In conclusion: The *Cheiroglossa palmata* is increasing in numbers with some excellent adult plants. A total of nine ferns had *sporangia* and of these five had from five to twelve.

Did Hurricane Wilma and the resulting vegetation loss in 2006 have any effect on the life cycle of *Cheiroglossa*? There was greater sunlight exposure for the 2006-2007 growing season resulting in only eleven plants counted. Then in 2007-2009 the sprouting vegetation shaded the habitats resulting in significant plant increases. Looking forward to next year's count.

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 mission of the Friends of Fakahatchee is 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 | | | | |
| | Treasurer – Vicky Nagle | Secretary – Marya Repko | | | | |
| BOARD: | Rick Cruz | Frank Denninger | Dennis Giardina | Cathy Hatch | Tom Maish | Susan O'Farrell |
| | Karen Relish | Bud Scott | David Shindle | Glenn Stacell | Nelson Tilden | |

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