



The Ghost Writer

FEBRUARY, 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

March 21, April 18
Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child
Reservations Required.
Phone (239) 695-1023 or email
islandgirm@msn.com

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

Sat, Feb 14 Tues, Feb 20
Sat, Mar 14 Tues, Mar 17
Sat, Apr 11 Tues, Apr 21
For info, phone (239) 695-1023.

ANNUAL PICNIC

Sunday, March 1, at 11:00 a.m.
Mesce Pavilion, Copeland
See directions on page 4.

FOF BOARD MEETINGS

Sunday, February 15, at 9:00 a.m.
Sunday, March 8, at 9:00 a.m.
Big Cypress Preserve Pavilion
Members Welcome!

AMAZING ADVENTURES

Friday, March 6, at 6:30 p.m.
Rookery Bay, Naples
"Grizzly Bears in the Arctic"
by Ralph Arwood
See www.rookerybay.org

Read about More Events on the back page and on the Calendar which is also on our website.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 1/5/09, in the late morning, Renee Rau, Park Manager, Alicia Mumford, Park Ranger, and Laura Skinner, AmeriCorps member, saw a female **Snail Kite** over Dan House Prairie. On 1/6/09, Mike Owen, Biologist, saw a Coopers Hawk over the Park Headquarters. On 1/7/09, Alicia Mumford saw a **Big Cypress Fox squirrel**. On 1/12/09, Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, saw a **striped crayfish snake** and a **yellow rat snake** just east of the Prairie Canal. He also saw a **Bobcat** near Gate 16.

On 1/12/09, Chris Becker, District IV Biologist, Steve Houseknecht and Terrance Craig, Park Ranger, saw a dead **Sharp-shinned Hawk** near Prairie Canal. On 1/12/09, Laura Skinner noted the first instars of the **lubber grasshoppers** for the 2009 season on the railings of the park bathrooms. On 1/6/09, Richard Fagan, volunteer, saw 2 **Red-shouldered hawks** mating at the top of a Cypress, 2.5 miles north of the Park office, off of Janes Scenic Drive (JSD). On 1/11/09, Richard Fagan observed a female **Sharp-shinned Hawk** over Janes Scenic Drive dive into the east ditch then into a tree. He also saw one later flying over the G12 Parking area. On 1/12/09, in the early afternoon, Dave Moore, FPP, saw a 5.5 foot long **Eastern diamondback rattlesnake** just north of the Park headquarters.

On 1/16/09, near the shop, Virgil and Joanna Allmond, volunteers, observed a **Florida Chicken turtle** deposit 6-8 eggs in a nest cavity. The turtle took almost one and a half hours to dig this nest and deposit and cover its eggs. On 1/19/09, Ron Kotliar, volunteer, and Richard Fagan saw 1,000 **Tree swallows**, a **Florida Chicken turtle** and a **Florida Snapping turtle** along Janes Scenic Drive. On 1/22/09, Mike Owen and Laura Skinner saw a **Summer Tanager** flying to a prairie hammock east of JSD about one mile north of the Fire tower.

On 1/27/09, in the afternoon, Renee Rau, one **Eastern Mud Snake** was seen southeast part of Preserve. On 2/2/09, in the morning, Renee Rau and Steve Houseknecht saw 40 **White pelicans** circling overhead over US-41 near the East River Roost.

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



Friends of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve

ANNUAL PICNIC

Sunday, March 1, 2009
from 11:00 a.m.

Mesce Pavilion, Copeland

Live Music • Door Prizes • Great Food

RSVP to (239) 695-2905 or FOF_90@hotmail.com



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



Thanks to Michael Oliver, a visitor from Greenville, SC, who took this photo of a Bald Eagle at the Boardwalk on December 26. He said in his email:

I fell in love with the Fak & Big Cypress when I first stumbled upon it 10-12 years ago. I come back yearly, usually at the beginning of the dry season, for birding & nature photography (amateur) & to get away from civilization for a while. I like to stay at Burns Lake in Big Cypress & always make a point while down south to do the boardwalk & Jane's Scenic Drive. I desire to come back one summer (I must be crazy) & photograph the ghost orchid. Keep up all your good work in helping to protect this valuable & beautiful place.

Jack Berninger sent this email with his observations:

Elaine Berninger and two others saw a Panther on Bear Lake Road on January 20. Jack Berninger along with his daughter Bonnie and two grandchildren Care and Nick had a wonderful sighting of a Bobcat at the Cabin site along West Main (gate 7) on February 4. We were having lunch at the picnic table and the cat walks up to within 75 feet, stops to look at us and then sits down to further view us. After several minutes the children moved around and the cat walked off.



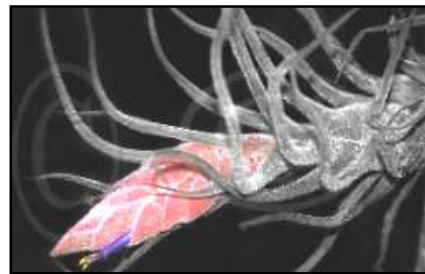
From Savannah's Eyes

It was so nice outside this past weekend. We took a drive down "Janes Scenic Drive" in Copeland. We drove all the way to Naples on the Drive. It ended at a camp site that my brother stays at all the time. On the way there we saw a lot of animals. We saw Alligators, Snakes, Turtles, Birds, and a Deer. Also, the cypress trees and wild flowers were so beautiful. We took pictures a lot. And we had a picnic. My friend Cheyanee ("Shy") and I had a perfect view of the animals and scenery from the back seat of my Dad's truck. We all had a great time.

Savannah Oglesby is in the 6th grade at Everglades City School and is a regular contributor to The Mullet Rapper where this article first appeared on 1/23/09.

**FUZZY
WUZZY
DECLINE**

By Jack
Berninger



Tillandsia pruinosa (fuzzy wuzzy air plant) numbers have declined from last year. Elaine and I conducted a population count on January 7, 2009, in the Fakahatchee Strand and found 34 of these plants along an approximate 1000 meter section of the tram we have surveyed over the past four years. Twenty six of these plants were located on the south side and only eight on the north side of the tram. There is significant decrease of the plants on the north side.

Comparisons over the past four years:

	South	North
2006	17	1
2007	32	2
2008	21	31
2009	26	8

There was a total of eight plants blooming; five on south and three on north side. Average height above ground on south was 2.50 meters and on north side 4.03 meters.

Hurricane Wilma in 2005 and subsequent vegetation changes and sunlight exposure may have been a factor in the population shifts on the north side plants which face south. It will be interesting to see what 2010 provides.

The photo above of the Fuzzy Wuzzy is courtesy of Rick Cruz whose pictures can be seen at Clyde Butcher's Big Cypress Gallery in Ochopee and, for the month of February, at the Museum of the Everglades.



THANKS to Pat & Joe Weber (seen above with Manager Renee Rau and board member Bud Scott) who spent a month volunteering their talents to the Fak.

President's Message

Returning from the Members' Dinner in November, our guest Kathy Nederveld asked how she could help the Friends. Kathy said as a member she wasn't into "hands on" swamp work, but that she could host an informational dinner, inviting some of her friends who had never heard of the Fakahatchee.

With that "Take a Stand for the Strand" was born.

The evening of January 24; Kathy hosted 24 of her friends for a congenial evening of dinner and an infomercial on the Fakahatchee. Park Manager Renee Rau spoke of the attributes of the Fak and Dennis Giardina showed his photos of "A Year in the Fakahatchee Strand"

All that were invited knew that they would be receiving a first person view of the Fak the following day.

On that clear, beautiful Saturday, Mike Owen lead a group in a Giant Air Plant Survey; Dennis Giardina organized the removal of exotic Brazilian Pepper on Janes' Scenic, and Renee and Karen Relish led the Butterfly Count and Royal Palm phrenology on West Main.

During lunch, Board member and photographer Rick Cruz presented Kathy with the photo he had taken of Kathy's late husband Gary discovering a Ghost Orchid in 2006 that had been published in Miami newspapers.

Later a few intrepid folk ventured on a Swamp Walk led by Mike Owen and assisted by Karen Relish and volunteer Richard Fagan. A truly memorable day that has interested several in becoming members

See you in the FAK!!!

Tom Maish



BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson & Caryl Tilden
Volunteer Naturalists

If you have visited the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk this month you have seen more wading birds than have been visible during the past few winters. On a given day visitors have seen many mature and immature ibises, green herons, great blue herons, mature and immature black-crowned night herons, great egrets, wood storks and others. We are excited to report that two eagle chicks have been seen and photographed on the nest. For about two weeks only one chick had been observed. They would be about a month old now and are growing rapidly. For the first time in a couple of years a red shouldered hawk chick has been observed in the nest near the twin bald cypress trees. Twice during February a mother black bear and cub appeared near the end of the boardwalk and remained for several minutes while many visitors took pictures and enjoyed the sight.

Barred owls are heard regularly along the boardwalk, but rarely observed. What has been seen more frequently this winter is a great horned owl which often sits on the same limb in a tree about 100 yards west of the boardwalk. Experienced birder, Alan Murray, has been generous with his expertise and spotting scope. He has shown many visitors the great horned owl (and other birds) they would have otherwise missed. We appreciate his willingness to share.

Repairs have been carried out each Tuesday by a small crew of volunteers. Bud Scott, Dick Hughes, Jim Wink, Jerry Winters and I have replaced a number of deck boards, support stringers, and railings, many of which date back to 1981 when the last major renovation of the boardwalk was carried out. Jim Wink, Jerry Winters and Signe Backus swept the length of the boardwalk which was showing the effects of the annual dropping of leaves and bald cypress needles. We appreciate that Park Manager Renee Rau has given high priority to boardwalk repairs. Ranger Terrance Craig has been very helpful transporting new wood to the boardwalk and removing the "dead" wood.

The water level at the gator pond continues to drop and the wading birds are enjoying the concentration of food.

If you have not taken the opportunity to visit the boardwalk this winter, we invite you to do so soon.

LAST CHANCE

The deadline for nominations to the Board of Directors is **Wednesday, February 18**. If you would like to serve or know another member who is interested in being on the Board, please email:

friendsoffakahatchee@hotmail.com

or write to:

Jim Woodard

17001 SW 90 Ave., Palmetto Bay, FL 33157.

All nominations must be in writing, but questions can be addressed to Jim at (305) 856-4559.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 271 members. Thanks to all of you who replied promptly to your renewal notices!

Welcome to new members:

Carole & Rich Blazek, Bonita Springs
 Jim Herald, Bonita Springs
 Martha Lee, Carrboro, NC
 Larry & Charleen McPherson, Bonita Springs
 Thomas Trotta, Marco Island
 Jim & Karen Wink, Naples

The Florida Park Service District 4 Volunteer Appreciation Day will be on **Saturday, February 21**, at Koreshan State Park. For info, phone (239) 695-4593.

ANNUAL PICNIC

The location of the Annual Picnic on **Sunday, March 1**, is the Mesce Pavilion in Copeland. From SR-29, go towards the Ranger Station on Janes Scenic Drive. You will see signs directing you to the left just before Lake Gloria and volunteers will indicate parking places.

PLEASE let us know before Friday, February 20 if you are attending so we can tell the caterer how much food to prepare. Phone Marya at (239) 695-2905 or email FOF_90@hotmail.com.

More Events

Feb 14-15: "Jammin' in the Hammock", Bluegrass Festival, Collier Seminole State Park, Naples, phone (239) 394-3397. *FOF will have an information booth.*

Feb 14-16: "Muck-About", Big Cypress Gallery, Ochopee, phone (239) 695-2428 or see www.clydebutcher.com. *FOF will have an information booth.*

Feb 21: Wild Hog BBQ, Monroe Station, Ochopee, phone (239) 784-1328 or see www.wildhogbbq.org.

Feb 23-26: Marjory Stoneman Douglas Festival, Museum of the Everglades, phone (239) 695-0008 or see www.evergladesmuseum.org.

March 14: Marco Island Community Conservation Celebration, phone (239) 389-5033. *FOF will have an information booth.*

March 15-21: Florida Panther Week, Naples, phone (239) 353-8442. *FOF will have an information booth.*

To volunteer at the FOF information booth at any of these events, phone Marya on (239) 695-2905.

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
 Treasurer – Vicky Nagle

Vice-President – Dennis Giardina
 Secretary – Marya Repko

BOARD: Rick Cruz
 Karen Relish

Frank Denninger
 Bud Scott

Dennis Giardina
 David Shindle

Cathy Hatch
 Glenn Stacell

Tom Maish
 Susan O'Farrell
 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: _____

ALTERNATE ADDRESS

CITY _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

PHONE _____

MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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