



The Ghost Writer

APRIL, 2009

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturday in April
Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child
Reservations Required.
Phone (239) 695-1023 or email
islandgirm@msn.com

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

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

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

Sat, Apr 11 Tues, Apr 21
For info, phone (239) 695-1023.

Photo Safari led by Rick Cruz
Saturday, April 18, at 10:00 a.m.
Clyde Butcher's Big Cypress Gallery
For info, phone (239) 695-2428

AMAZING ADVENTURES

Friday, May 1, at 6:30 p.m.
Rookery Bay, Naples
"Bahamas Experience"
by David Addison
See www.rookerybay.org

News from the Jones Grade Area
Terry Wilson has seen a coyote, raccoons, woodpeckers including the northern flicker and red-bellied and downy as well as great blues, anhingas, double-crested cormorants, blue herons and even a Florida panther!

**This is the last issue of *The Ghost Writer* until the fall ... unless we have spectacular news to report.
Have a great summer!**

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 2/25/09 Mike Owen, Park Biologist, noted 300 **tree swallows** hitting the water surface of Lake Harmon. He also noted **green anole** in the Headquarter area. On 2/26/09, in the late morning, he saw a **wood stork** fly over South Main. On 2/26/09 Reggie Norman, field supervisor for SE Chemtreat, observed a **Crested Caracara** steal a fish from a crow at Gate 20, south of Janes Scenic Drive. On 2/27/09, Mike Owen observed one **American kestrel** landing in a pine in Four Stakes Prairie. On 2/28/09, around 5:30 PM, a field supervisor for SE Chemtreat, Oliver Palmer, saw a **panther** near Gate 20.

On 2/28/09, around 3:30 PM, Richard Fagan, volunteer, observed a 4.5 foot **Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake** on Janes Scenic Drive near Gate 17. On 3/3/09, Virgil Allmond, volunteer, and Terrance Craig, Park Ranger, saw a **bobcat** chasing something just North of Gate 7. On 3/5/09, Alicia Mumford, Park Ranger, saw a **green anole** at the Park Headquarters restroom area.

On 3/6/09, in the early afternoon, Mike Owen observed off of East Main or G12, **Blue gray knat catcher**, **Yellow-rumped warbler**, **Northern Parula**, **palm warblers**, two **Red-shouldered hawks**, and a **black and white warbler**. On the return to the office, Mike heard a **martin**. On 3/2/09 he saw two **Swallow-tailed kites** over G12 and on 3/9/09, in the afternoon, he observed four Swallow-tailed kites – two over the Harmon Brother Borrow pits and two over SR 29. On 3/10/09, Mike Owen observed one **adult Bald Eagle** soaring east over Headquarters about 300 feet high and landing on the North shore of the Harmon lake. On 3/11/09, Mike observed 110 **Great egrets**, 250 **White Ibis** and 8 **Wood storks** feeding in the ditches of the drive. He also saw a **Swallow tailed kite** flying over Gate 19. On the return to the office, he saw a **Great White Heron** on the drive near Gate 12.

On 3/14/09, Barbara Stoner, volunteer, observed a **black racer** on Janes Scenic drive near the Water Treatment plant and about 1 mile and a half down JSD saw another one. On 3/17/09, Mike Owen observed two **Swallow-tailed kites**, one male **Northern Harrier** flying and five **Eastern Meadowlarks** and a **white eyed vireo** calling over Four Stakes Prairie. On 3/17/09, Jo Allmond, volunteer, observed an immature **Bald Eagle** feeding on the edge of the Harmon lakes. On 3/18/09, in the early evening, Alicia Mumford observed an adult **raccoon** and 3 juvenile **cottonmouths** on Jones Grade. On 3/22/09, Bob Czarnecki observed a **Red-shouldered hawk** grab a snake with its talons and fly East over Gate 1. On 4/3/09, Terrance Craig and Renee Rau saw a **Bald Eagle** flying west in a clockwise pattern on US-41 about 3 miles west of SR-29.

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

We had this email from Howard Lubel:

Just a note for the next Ghost Writer. I was on JSD about one mile east of West Main at about 5:30 pm on February 10th when I saw a nice size black bear amble into the roadway and begin to sniff and look around. The bear stayed on the road long enough for me to call Miami on my cell phone and describe the sighting to my partner in life and the outdoors, Rose. Just as the bear moved into the brush on the far side of the road and disappeared from view, two cubs sprinted out of the trees and after momma. It was quite a sighting.

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



The Rabbit and the Mink

by Dennis Giardina

One morning in March, at about 10:00 a.m., I was at the Fakahatchee boardwalk, mapping the sections of it that need to be repaired when I got a phone call from Tallahassee. As I was talking, I started to hear scurrying like the sounds of a chase, coming from the ferns and brush along the side and underneath the boardwalk. I hung up the phone and went to the edge of the boardwalk and right below me a rabbit started to scream. I thought a rat snake was responsible and when I knelt down to look, I could see the rabbit but apparently I scared away its predator.

I called Nelson and Tom over and lifted the rabbit up onto the boardwalk. It was about a half-grown bunny and it was dead. As we examined it, we could hear rustling just under the brush around us. I put the rabbit back down on the side of the boardwalk and, for a minute or so, we could hear something (or several things) darting around. A couple of times we saw a head pop up out of the vegetation and realized it was a mink but it was so wary that even an eye blink would make it duck back down and scurry away.

I set my camera up on the railing above the rabbit and waited for the mink to come in and get its prey. I took one picture but the flash made the mink recoil. Then I turned the dial on my camera to video but I was so excited by what was going on that I hit a button other than the shutter and I missed my chance at a couple of seconds of video when it finally came back in and snatched the rabbit.

The funny thing is, first thing in the morning when Nelson and I were walking out onto the boardwalk, we came across some very fresh scat not far from where this all took place. Nelson asked me what I thought and I said that it might be mink scat. I had never seen mink scat and, until later that day, I had never even seen a wild mink. Lucky guess!



About 60 members and guests gathered on April 5 for the Annual Meeting & Dinner at the Seafood Depot in Everglades City. After brief reports from FOF President Tom Maish and park manager Renee Rau, volunteer pins were presented (see list below). And, then, to his great surprise, Nelson Tilden (left in photo) was given the Mel Finn Award in recognition of his contribution to the Fak. Nelson is a former FOF president and "the keeper of the boardwalk". He invited his wife Caryl, who works alongside him, to share the honor. Also in the photo above is Allen Caldwell, Franklin Adams, and Tom Maish.



After the meal, member Glen Stacell gave an illustrated talk about the animals in the Fak. Glen is a retired teacher and kept his "class" in line with tinges of humor.

VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Official Florida State Park pins were awarded to volunteers with a record of their time spent helping the Fak and FOF. Thanks to Vicky Nagle for organizing the pins. Recipients are:

over 1000 hours: Pam Mesce, Caryl Tilden, Nelson Tilden

over 500 hours: Ron Kotliar, Vicky Nagle, Joe Weber

over 250 hours: Elsa Caldwell, Ken Harris, Marya Repko, Robert Russell, Bud Scott, Pat Weber

over 100 hours: Jo Allmond, Virgil Allmond, Signe Backus, Allen Caldwell, Rick Cruz, John Elting, Richard Fagan, Helen Harris, Cathy Hatch, Tom Maish, Bill Mesce, Gary Miller, Ruth Pawlak, Eugene Pekarwek, Linda Russell, Margaret Scott, Jerry Winters

over 50 hours: Elaine Berninger, Jack Berninger, Jack Horner, Bob Merrill, Ducey Merrill, Bill Paquin, Jim Woodard, Niki Woodard

President's Message

As the Friends' wrap up another Season there have been significant accomplishments.

More people (not just members) stepped up to volunteer. This, with our two scheduled Volunteer work days per month, has doubled the Volunteer hours contributed to the Park!

The position of Volunteer Coordinator was implemented and a Volunteer Service Award program was established.

A new "self guided" Boardwalk brochure was designed, printed, and is now available at the entrance to the Boardwalk. You can also download a copy from our website.

Our #1 Goal has been to expand and renovate the Boardwalk and to construct a "green" Interpretative Center. Your Board has set aside \$50,000.00 to start the planning process as soon as permission is granted by the Park Service. This planning process will require the Board to evolve from seasonal to year around. Currently over 13,000 Visitors are visiting the Boardwalk in a month; far more than its capacity.

The Big Cypress National Preserve commissioned a video to display in their new Visitor's Center. It was filmed by Elam Stoltzfus of Live Oak Productions and titled BIG CYPRESS; THE WESTERN EVERGLADES. The video will air on PBS in July. Watch for it! The work is stunning; displaying the Fakahatchee and Big Cypress in all of the glory of each of the Seasons. You can see a preview at www.bigcypressswamp.org.

The Friends were asked to contribute funding to the film as the Big Cypress eco system includes the Fakahatchee. We agreed and will have our own promotional video of the Fakahatchee footage including the Friends' role. John Elting was filmed leading a Swamp Walk that will be used on our website to show potential "swamp walkers" what to expect. Nelson and Caryl Tilden spoke at the Boardwalk to show the repairs needed and a plea is made for funding. Copies of the finished product will be available this Fall.

All the Best,
Tom Maish

FLORIDA TRAILS

Some of our newest members, as well as some of long standing, are also members of the Florida Trail Association. On **Sunday, June 6**, they will be celebrating National Trails Day with special activities.

There are several local chapters in Southern Florida that have regular hikes, workdays, and meetings. To find the one nearest you, see www.floridatrail.org.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson & Caryl Tilden
Volunteer Naturalists

This is our last boardwalk report of this winter's season. This year there were many repairs to the boardwalk, including several new support beams near the observation platform, new decking and over 300 feet of new railings. The core team of volunteers who assisted us almost every week were Bud Scott, Dick Hughes and Jim Wink. Other volunteers who helped were Tom Maish, Jerry Winters and, notably, Dennis Giardina who hand-dug all eight of the post holes for the support beams. Transportation of wood and materials was provided by Park Rangers Terrance and Alicia, and AmeriCorps staff member, Laura, through the cooperation of Park Manager, Renee Rau.

Once again this year Bud and Marg Scott served as boardwalk greeters. Their cheerful and helpful information greatly added to the enjoyment of the boardwalk by visitors. In addition, they sold FOF merchandise and gave out publications. The park and the FOF appreciate their continued work.

This season we had a successful nesting of the **bald eagle** pair once again. One of the bald eagle chicks was seen flying from the nest on April 6, and can be expected to leave the area in the next week or two. There are two different nests where **red-shouldered hawks** have young chicks this year. Also visible from the boardwalk is an **osprey** nest, also with young. This was a good year for our birds of prey.

The gator hole at the end of the boardwalk is the driest for this point in the early spring that we have seen for several years. The wading birds have moved on to other areas offering more food, but the adult female **alligator** and 8 to 10 juveniles are still finding enough fish and other food to remain at the gator hole.

High points of the season were several sightings of a **black bear** and cub, several observations of **bobcats**, and one sighting of a **panther** crawling under the boardwalk and walking off to the east. Others included the capture of a **greater siren** (a nearly 20 inch long salamander) by an **eastern mud snake**. A **rabbit** being taken by an **everglades mink** was spotted and photographed by Dennis Giardina. FOF president Tom Maish and I also observed the event (*see p. 2*).

Despite the downturn in the economy, attendance by visitors was very strong during the entire winter season and donations were excellent as well. Several articles in local publications helped raise the visibility of the Fakahatchee and the boardwalk.

Clearly the boardwalk will need to be replaced in the next few years and plans are underway to develop a capital campaign for a new boardwalk, a "green" visitor's center, and new restrooms. Much more about this will be forthcoming.

We look forward to our next boardwalk report in the fall.

"Protecting Paradise: Collier County Conservation"

WGCU, the PBS station for Collier & Lee counties, will show an episode of the "Untold Stories" series about development in the Glades on **Friday, April 24**, at 8:30 p.m. See www.wgcu.org.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 268 members. Renewal notices for the 2nd quarter will go out on May 1.

Welcome to new members:

- S. Barcus, Chicago, IL
- Sabrata Basu, South Miami
- Diana Curry, Chokoloskee

NEW DIRECTORS & OFFICERS

The new directors elected officers at the Board Meeting on April 5 (see panel below). Retiring directors Rick Cruz, Frank Denninger, Cathy Hatch, Karen Relish, Bud Scott, and Nelson Tilden will all be missed.

Jim & Niki Woodard sent this email:

Saturday night, as we were returning from our hike, we saw David Moore patrolling the west end of Janes Drive around 7:30 p.m. In all of the years that we have been hiking the Fakahatchee, we have almost never seen a law enforcement officer at all and absolutely never seen one after dark. I don't know if assigning him to the Fakahatchee was related to our outcry over the killing of the bear. If so, it was an effort well spent.

Officer Moore is performing a very important service for the park. His job is dangerous and his communication spotty. I am not naive enough to think that one officer will be able to undo years of law enforcement neglect in an area the size of the Fak.

However, one officer with his dedication will certainly send a message that the state is serious about protecting the preserve. We hope that we are able to keep him for as long as he is willing to stay and we will be happy to help him any way we can.

FOF Priorities for 2009/2010

The following list will be submitted to the Manager and, with her approval, to the Parks Department:

1. Renovate and increase size of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk
2. Provide Park Office space for FOF meetings, office, and storage
3. Construct a "green" Visitors' Interpretative Center
4. Hold lectures & membership meetings on East and West coasts
5. Petition FDOT to re-open north section of abandoned Old US-41 for parking at the Boardwalk
6. Find space to set up a Park Biologist's laboratory & office
7. Petition Parks Dept to change name from "Big Cypress Bend" to "Fakahatchee Strand" Boardwalk
8. Set up Pay Pal account for membership; swamp walks, canoe trips, and merchandise sales
9. Recruit and train 2 to 4 Volunteers to aid in Boardwalk and swamp walk interpretation
10. Petition FDOT to install a Fakahatchee Strand Preserve sign at I-75 & SR-29
11. Hold additional fundraising/membership recruiting activities
12. Purchase/construct a portable Booth for outside exhibits
13. Install a gate on south portion abandoned US-41

A few short-term goals include: construct viewing platform on the Boardwalk near the bald eagles' nest, put trash cans near rest stops at Boardwalk, install Port-a-Potty and picnic table at East River canoe launch, clear East Main from Ballard cabin to Jones Grade, and design new FOF brochure.

If you suspect illegal activity in the Park, contact our full-time DEP Park Police Officer David Moore on his cell phone: 239-821-2870.

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 | | | | |
| | Secretary – Susan O'Farrell | Treasurer – Vicky Nagle | | | | |
| BOARD: | Allen Caldwell | Elsa Caldwell | Saul Friess | Dennis Giardina | Tom Maish | Allison Nist |
| | Susan O'Farrell | David Shindle | Glenn Stacey | 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)

NAME _____

STREET / P.O.BOX: _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

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MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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