



The Ghost Writer

OCTOBER, 2008

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

Dec 6, 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

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| Sat, Nov 8 | Tues, Nov 18 |
| Sat, Dec 13 | Tues, Dec 16 |
| Sat, Jan 10 | Tues, Jan 20 |
| Sat, Feb 14 | Tues, Feb 17 |
| Sat, Mar 14 | Tues, Mar 17 |
| Sat, Apr 11 | Tues, Apr 21 |

Details about the work will be available closer to the dates.
For info, phone (239) 695-1023.

"Welcome Back! What's New?"

MEMBERS' DINNER/TALK

Friday, November 14, at 6:00 p.m.
Seafood Depot, Everglades City
RSVP to (239) 695-2905 or to
FOF_90@hotmail.com

Wildlife Refuge Day

Saturday, October 11, from 9:00 a.m.
Port of the Islands
(US-41 south of Collier Seminole State Park)
boat tours, talks, music, family fun
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!
phone (239) 353-8442 or email
RefugeEvents@gmail.com

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

SUMMER REPORT

by Mike Owen, Karen Relish, and Ron Kotliar

On 6/2 Bob Newbould, now Park Ranger at Anastasia State Park, saw a **River Otter** running across the bridge after turning onto Janes Scenic Drive. Also on 6/2 Jay Staton, volunteer and photographer, saw a **Black Bear** on West Main Tram off of Janes Scenic Drive. On 6/4 around 7:30 PM, Rick Cruz, volunteer and photographer, saw a 350 lb. **Black Bear** on Janes Scenic Drive. On 6/9 Park Manager Renee Rau and Rick Cruz saw an **Everglades Mink** running down Janes Scenic Drive south of Gate 12. On 6/16 Mike Owen noted 2 **Tree Swallows** at the Park shop. On 6/17 around 11 AM, Ron Kotliar, volunteer, saw a **River Otter** on Janes Scenic Drive. On 6/30 Ron Kotliar saw a **Florida Cottonmouth** on Janes Scenic Drive.

On 7/10 around 6:30 PM, Bob Newbould saw an **Everglades Mink** crossing Janes Scenic Drive north of Gate 1. On 7/21 Dennis Llewellyn, volunteer, observed a **Southeastern Five-lined Skink** on Janes Scenic Drive along the tram at Gate 2. On 7/26 Steve Houseknecht and Jill Waisley, now an employee at Everglades National Park, saw a **Florida Panther** on Janes Scenic Drive near Gate 7.

On 8/1 Mike Owen, while collecting hydrological data, saw a 200 pound **Black Bear** walk to the west into East Prairie. On 8/8 Steve Houseknecht saw a **Yellow Rat Snake** near the park office. On 8/20 Bob Wilson, a UPS driver, saw a **Black Bear** near Jones Grade. On 8/28 Ron Kotliar saw a **Bald Eagle** in its nest by the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk and it has continuously been sighted in this nest during September.

On 9/2 Mike Owen and Karen Relish saw one **Cooper's hawk** flying over the park office. On 9/12 Mike Owen documented 1 road kill **Barn Owl** on US-41 on the way to the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. In September, Bob Czarnecki and Karen Relish observed a mother **Bobcat** and 2 kittens near Jones Grade. On 9/27 Mike Owen and Donna Glann-Symth noted 7 non-venomous **Fish-eating Spiders** (*Dolomedes okefinokensis*) while out swamp walking. While driving to their swamp walk starting point, they also saw an **American Bittern** in the prairie.

Mike Owen reports that **water levels** are up compared to last year at this time. The rain gauge in Copeland measured 48.67 inches since June 1. The average annual rainfall there since 1979 is 62 inches. He says that the plugging of the Prairie Canal has helped to reduce drainage on the west side of the Fak.

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

It's first come, first served, at the Naples Orchid Society's annual plant sale at The Conservancy of Southwest Florida in Naples on **Saturday, October 18**, from 12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m. or until the plants are gone. In past years, people have begun lining up early and the plants go fast. For info, phone (239) 403-7155 or see www.naplesorchidsociety.org



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

At Long Last, *Lixadmontia*

by Dennis Giardina

I have written several articles for the "Ghost Writer" over the last couple of years about Mexican bromeliad weevils *Metamasius callizona* and the threat they pose to Florida's native bromeliads but a quick recap for those who are not familiar with the issue: twenty years ago they were accidentally imported into the state of Florida in a shipment of ornamental bromeliads from Mexico. They found their way into natural areas and have spread throughout the southern third of the state, decimating once lush populations of native bromeliads. A group of scientists from the University of Florida led by Dr's Howard Frank and Ron Cave discovered a fly in Honduras, parasitizing the larva of bromeliad weevils. This fly *Lixadmontia franki* is a specialist; the flies only prey on bromeliad weevil larvae and they cannot survive without them. Techniques were developed to rear these flies in the laboratory and after 15 years of research, official permission was given to release them in Florida last year.

Mexican bromeliad weevils were first found in the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve (the bromeliad capital of North America with 14 of our 16 total native species) by park biologist Mike Owen in 2002 but they haven't caused a noticeable decline or die off of the Preserve's bromeliads and they haven't even been seen anywhere on the Preserve since then. However, this past April while Mike and I were on the way out to inspect a pair of cigar orchids, we started to notice that the remarkable population of giant air plants *Tillandsia utriculata* that we surveyed and documented the year before was not looking too good. We spied a fallen cardinal air plant *Tillandsia fasciculata* on the ground and we decided to inspect it. We tugged on the center leaves and they slipped right out, bad sign. We dismantled the bromeliad and inside the heart of the plant was the writhing, grub-like larva of a bromeliad weevil, our nemesis ... crap.

We reared the larva through metamorphosis, and when the adult form of the weevil emerged from its puparium (cocoon) we called Howard and Ron and asked if we could schedule a release at Fakahatchee Strand as soon as possible. This June, a group of us gathered in our bromeliad plot with Ron Cave and his three kids to release 60 *Lixadmontia* flies. We snapped pictures as Ron and Mike Owen unzipped the door of the little white tent that the flies were transported in and most of them flew out in their strange, floating style of flying. Inevitably a few flies don't survive the trip, are damaged in transit or are malformed. I remember helping out one poor little fly who was spinning in a circle, upside down on the surface of the water. I scooped him up and looked him over. The flies look like a slightly hairier version of a house fly with big orange eyes and funny V-shaped antennae on their forehead, only this one apparently had just one wing. I walked over to a cypress tree a few feet away and I placed him on the leaf of a bromeliad. Just as I stepped back, feeling good about my rescue, a big tree ant jumped out from behind the bromeliad and grabbed my fly. "No!" I said out loud, and I reached back for the fly. For a second I found myself in a macabre tug-of-war with one insect using another insect, my insect! As I tried

to pull the fly away gently, the ant tackled the fly, rolled it over and out of my grip. They fell somewhere out of sight and though I looked, I never found them.

On September 5th, Ron came down with another 110 flies from the Biological Control Laboratory in Ft. Pierce. Another *Lixadmontia* fly release is planned for Fakahatchee in December. We are hoping that the flies are able to reproduce and survive in Fakahatchee and wherever Mexican bromeliad weevils occur in Florida. So far we have only been able to verify one case of a second generation of flies in one of the several release sites around the state. A group of us went out to the release site again on September 26th to collect weevil larvae. The hope is that a fly larva will emerge from the weevil larvae we collected and we will have evidence of *Lixadmontia* fly reproduction in Fakahatchee. Our best case scenario is that these flies will be able to survive in Florida. They will seek out and parasitize bromeliad weevils and reduce their numbers and the damage they inflict upon our native bromeliads. The flies will never eradicate the weevils but control them to where the bromeliads, the weevils and the flies are all able to survive and reproduce. Ideally we would like to have more than one parasite to use to control bromeliad weevils and the search continues in Central America for additional parasites of the Mexican bromeliad weevil. Howard Frank, Tim Andrus, Jose Monson and I will spend two weeks in Guatemala this November to see if we can do just that. Wish us luck.



Ranger Karen Relish and Dr. Ron Cave releasing *Lixadmontia* flies in the Fakahatchee on 9/5/08. Photos right of bromeliad weevil larva and *Lixadmontia* fly.



Dennis Giardina is Everglades Region Biologist for Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission. He is an invasive species specialist and former Park Manger of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve. He is a regular contributor to our newsletter.



Renee Rau, Mike Bullock, Mike Owen, Steve Houseknect
Valinda Subic, BJ Givens

President's Message

Welcome back to our seasonal Friends and visitors!

Your Board Committees have been working throughout the summer to jump start the Friends' activities this season.

One major action was taken in June when your Board approved the trimming of brush along 7.5 miles of Janes Scenic Drive and 2.5 miles up East Main on both sides for \$5000. All of you who have worked on cutting brush will really appreciate the work saved

The Friends now have a permanent phone number to call for Swamp Walks, Canoe Trips, and Volunteer Work Days: (239) 695-1023.

Many have asked: *what can I do to help?* Starting Saturday November 8th there will be Volunteer Work Days in the Fak on the 2nd Saturday and 3rd Tuesday of each month from November through April. Please call Pam at (239) 695-1023 to join the crew.

We are working on a Friends' Activity Calendar that you can post on your fridge or wherever so you will know what's going on in the Fak. We hope to finalize all the events for the next issue of the newsletter but here is a rough draft. There is a membership application on the reverse side so please print a few extra copies to hand out to prospective members.

See you on the Boardwalk or in the swamp!

Tom Maish

The Alligator Amblers chapter of the Florida Trails Association have planned their activities for the season. Events include bike rides, paddles, and hikes. For the schedule, see <http://amblers.floridatrail.org/>.



A PLEASANT SURPRISE

by Tom Maish

Renee Rau, our Park Manager, received an unexpected call from Mike Bullock, Director of Parks, who said that he would like a Swamp Walk in the Fakahatchee. Renee thought that a representative of the Friends should be included so she called and asked if I could attend.

On September 15, Mike Bullock, Valinda Subic, Bureau Chief of District 4, and her Assistant Chief B.J. Givens arrived at the Fak. Renee had prepared a tasty cookout prior to the walk. This gave us time to acquaint Mr. Bullock with the Fak and the Friends' role in assisting the Park Service.

We had prepared a notebook of the Friends' goals and achievements to present to Mr. Bullock and Ms. Subic. Later in the evening we had an opportunity to explain our CSO Goals, especially #1 (expanding the Boardwalk) and #2 (construction of a "green" interpretative Visitor's Center). Mr. Bullock was attentive and, I felt, receptive to what the Friends want to accomplish.

Mike Owen then lead us on a night Swamp Walk. It was a very magical evening in the Fakahatchee!

ROOKERY BAY has announced some of their events for the coming season.



The "Amazing Adventures" series will take place on the first Friday of January through April, 2009, and includes talks about jaguars in the Amazon and grizzly bears in the Arctic.

The Annual Southwest Florida Birding & Wildlife Festival will be held on January 16-18. Registration opens on November 1.

And, if you are in the area, stop in at the Environmental Learning Center (just south of the intersection of CR-951 and US-41) to see the changing art exhibits in the gallery. For more info, see www.rookerybay.org and click on the Calendar.

MEMBERSHIP

We have 289 members including 30 in arrears from the first, second and third quarters, all of whom will receive reminders with this newsletter. Renewals for the fourth quarter are also being sent.

Welcome to new members:

- John Hayes, New York, NY
- Douglas Rist, Sarasota
- Dr. Sue Roscoe, Sugar Grove, IL
- Patty Tuma, Port Charlotte
- Joe & Pat Weber, Columbus Station, OH

From the Elections Committee

We will soon be seeking nominations to the Board of Directors. We welcome your participation. You need to know that our policy statement requires, with some limited exceptions, that the nominee: be at least 18 years old, complete and submit a volunteer form, and participate in a minimum of two different volunteer projects approved by the Park Manager, documented by time sheets, within 12 months preceding the nomination. Other conditions also apply. Please participate in the volunteer projects scheduled on the work days (see front page for dates). You can direct your questions and suggestions to friendsoffakahatchee@hotmail.com.

FOF BOARD MEETING, Sunday, Nov 9, 10:30 a.m.
at the Mesce Pavilion, Copeland.



FOF was out in force for the Butchers' Labor Day Weekend "Muck-About". Seen above is swamp walk leader John Elting, who flew in especially for the event, talking to Lisa Andrews from Big Cypress National Preserve and Patty Huff who helped to give out our brochures. Photographer Rick Cruz, who also led walks, is pictured right wielding a mean machete.



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: _____ 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