



The Ghost Writer

DECEMBER, 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

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, Jan 10 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 or
email Karen.Relish@dep.state.fl.us.

FOF BOARD MEETING

Sunday, January 11, at 10:30 a.m.

Big Cypress Preserve Pavilion
Members Welcome!

AMAZING ADVENTURES

Friday, Jan 2, Rookery Bay

See details about the full series of
talks at www.rookerybay.com
or phone (239) 417-6310.

ART-IN-THE-GLADES

Saturday, Jan 17, Everglades City

To Volunteer on the FOF booth,
phone Marya at (239) 695-2905.

See Events for February on the
enclosed Calendar which you can
also download from our website.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 11/3, David Moore, Florida Park Patrol, observed an adult **Florida Panther** on Union Road. On 11/6, Karen Relish, OPS Park Ranger, observed 2 **Southern Bald Eagles** in their nest near the Boardwalk. On 11/7, Mike Owen, Park Biologist, was able to watch a female (white throat) **Ruby-Throated Hummingbird** feed on Fire Bush near Gate 7. On 11/9, in the late AM, Mike Owen and Donna Glann-Symth, volunteer, observed a **Sharp-Shinned Hawk** flying over Janes Scenic Drive between Gate3 and Gate7. In the early afternoon, Mike also saw one **Merlin** north of the Park Headquarters.

On 11/12, in the afternoon, Mike Owen heard a **Great Horned Owl** calling off of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. On 11/14 around 1615, Mike observed one **Snail Kite** female flying over the marsh South of US-41 and East of Faka-Union Canal. On 11/19, in the afternoon, Ron Kotliar, volunteer, saw a **Bobcat** on Janes Scenic Drive.

On the Friends of Fakahatchee Workday 11/18, Glen Stacell, volunteer, and Tom Maish, FOF President, and Rick Cruz, volunteer, while trimming around culverts, saw a dark chocolate brown **Everglades Mink** on Janes Scenic Drive. Also on 11/18, Renee Rau, Park Manager, saw a **Peninsula Newt** with its yellow orange belly and black dots off of Janes.

On 11/20, while continuing to trim around culverts, Renee Rau and Terrance Craig, Park Ranger, saw 2 **Florida Banded Water Snakes** swimming in the ditch. Renee Rau and Mike Owen saw 3 **Wood Ducks** (2 male and 1 female) near Gate 7. On 11/23 in the early evening, while in the swamp, Mike Owen, Terrance Craig and Karen Relish observed a **Sharp-Shinned Hawk** perch and then fly off. On 11/24, Ron Kotliar, helping Mike Owen collect data on **Chicken Turtles**, saw two of them along the north side of Janes. Volunteers Kathy Hatch and Ruth Guidry also saw a **Florida Banded Water Snake**, **Cottonmouth**, and **Striped Mud Turtle** while on the drive.

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



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

Lions and Tigers and Bears ... Almost

by Dennis Giardina

Over the past several decades an exotic, carnivorous mega-fauna has been established in South Florida. Two Old World reptiles, the Burmese python and Nile monitor lizard may become the most problematic of the 49 introduced species of reptile that now call Florida home. and are the focus of this article. It was bad enough to watch our native green and squirrel tree frogs get gobbled up by the imported Cuban tree frog and our native green anoles bullied and displaced by the non-native brown anole but now the presence of these two big species is disturbing and threatens our native wildlife on a much larger and wider scale.

Most of us have heard by now that Burmese pythons (*Python molurus*) were introduced to and are now spreading across South Florida. They are constrictors that can reach lengths of 20 feet and weigh in excess of 200 lbs. They prey on both warm and cold blooded animals as large as alligators and bobcats. Apparently individuals were released and existed for a time in Everglades National Park and were only infrequently detected. At some point during the 1990's they reached critical mass (enough of them surviving to breed and spread) and all of a sudden they seemed to be everywhere. In the early 2000's they started popping up in Big Cypress National Preserve, Collier-Seminole State Park and in January 2006, one was caught by an exotic plant crew on Fakahatchee Strand Preserve.

Sometime during the early 1990's, the third largest lizard species in the world and a close cousin of the Komodo dragon, the Nile monitor lizard (*Varanus niloticus*) was introduced to Cape Coral. By the end of the decade, they too reached critical mass and spread across the Cape Coral peninsula and have been sighted on Pine Island, Sanibel, and Ft. Myers. A second population of Nile monitors was detected in Miami-Dade County in the early 1990's after Hurricane Andrew but persisted at barely detectable levels until the summer of 2008 when a verified reproducing population was discovered on and around Homestead Air Reserve Base. Native to all of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Nile monitor is an extremely efficient predator (they eat anything they can catch), also a scavenger and can reach lengths of almost seven feet and weigh over 35 lbs.

To a reptile lover (like me) it is shame that these two magnificent species were moved from their native ecosystems, where they fit in beautifully, and introduced to Florida because our native wildlife did not evolve with them and are more susceptible to them. Some of

our rare and endangered wildlife species are especially vulnerable. Both species are indiscriminate carnivores. In Africa, Nile monitor lizards often depredate the nests of Nile crocodiles. Intelligent creatures, groups of them have been observed working together to distract female crocodiles away from their nests, while others dig up and eat the eggs. There is an endangered crocodile species in Florida. Both species threaten the eggs and young of ground nesting birds, mammals and reptiles. Female Florida panthers make their dens in dense vegetation and their kittens are very vulnerable for their first month or so and could easily be preyed upon by a python.

What are we doing about this? Biologists, law enforcement agents, and land managers are collaborating to develop methods to bait and trap pythons and monitor lizards. We are implementing Early Detection and Rapid Response efforts to eradicate or contain new infestations of these animals. There is a toll free phone number for the public to call and report exotic wildlife. In the Florida Keys, phone 1-800-IVEGOT1. In Miami-Dade, phone 305-753-3557. Southwest Florida will have a number soon.

What can you do? Avoid buying large exotic snakes and lizards. There is now a hundred-dollar-per-year permit fee to buy and own several large pythons and monitor lizards. If you already have one and can no longer keep it: **don't let it loose!** Florida FWC sponsors a Pet Amnesty Day several times a year in many different locations. You can turn in your unwanted pet no questions asked. The next Pet Amnesty Day in our area will be at the Metro Zoo in Miami in early 2009. Go to www.myfwc.com for more information.

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.



Nile Monitor Lizard, about 6-feet long, at Homestead Air Reserve Base this summer (photo: Ileana Burns).

VOLUNTEER WORK DAY



Volunteers spent Saturday, December 13, clearing culverts and cutting brush on Janes Scenic Drive.



English visitor Steve Paddon took these photos of a bobcat on the Boardwalk on December 8.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson & Caryl Tilden

The month of December has been an excellent one for wildlife sightings. All during November there were reports of a single bald eagle near the nest, but on December 6, both adult eagles were observed at the nest, along with much vocalization. After that point it was common to see the top of one head in the nest and occasional returns of the other adult with food. Based on these observations, a chick or chicks should hatch in the first ten days of January.

Two different visitors have recently photographed Florida black bears standing on the boardwalk – one of them with a cub. Another visitor photographed a bobcat, also standing in the middle of the boardwalk in the early afternoon. Other observations have included an adult raccoon with two juveniles, ribbon snakes, a red rat snake and numerous Florida red-bellied turtles.

During November two adult alligators were seen daily at the gator hole. During December, the larger of the two has been seen only rarely. On a positive note, on December 12 three members of the most recent hatch (approximately September 1) were seen for the first time. That coincides with the timing last year when the newborns were first seen, with sighting of up to 15 at the time thereafter.

The numbers and types of birds at the gator hole have been greater in number as December has progressed. Commonly seen are two black-crowned night herons, green herons, great egrets, great blue herons, anhingas, kingfishers, wood storks, ibis, red-shouldered hawks, and several types of small birds. A barred owl also puts in a rare appearance along the boardwalk.

We are now answering the common question “why are all these trees dead?” It gives us the chance to explain that the bald cypress are deciduous conifers and that it is their wintertime here. In February they will be leafed out again. It appears to be especially intriguing to our many foreign visitors.

If you have not had a chance to visit the boardwalk lately, it is a very special place. Come and visit!



Bear on the Boardwalk, photo taken by Kat McClintock in early December this year.

MEMBERSHIP

We have a total of 271 members. Membership is annual but the renewal is due during the quarter in which a member joined (eg, if you signed up in April or May or June, your renewal is due in the 2nd quarter). Renewal notices for the 1st quarter will go out in the New Year.

Please reply promptly when you receive membership notices. You will save FOF postage and time. We look forward to your continued support.

New Directors to be Elected

We are now seeking nominations for candidates for election to the Board of Directors for the election to be held in 2009. Our policy statement requires, with some limited exceptions, that nominees must: be a member of FOF at least 18 years old; complete and submit a volunteer form; participate in a minimum of two different volunteer projects approved by the Park Manager, documented by time sheets, within the 12 months preceding the nomination. Other conditions also apply.

We welcome your participation now, including attendance at the monthly Board meetings and volunteer projects. Please direct your questions, suggestions and nominations to James Woodard c/o friendsoffakahatchee@hotmail.com or phone our secretary Marya Repko at (239) 695-2905.



“Welcome Back” DINNER

Over 40 members and guests heard from FOF President Tom Maish, Park Manager Renee Rau, and Boardwalk Coordinator Nelson Tilden about what happened in the Fak over the summer and what’s planned for this season while enjoying a buffet dinner on November 14 at the Seafood Depot in Everglades City.

One special guest was Kathy Nederveld who thanked FOF for keeping her late husband Gary’s name alive in the Nederveld Memorial Fund which is used to purchase canoe and kayak equipment. Gary intended to lead our canoe trips during the 2006 winter season but had an unfortunately fatal accident in September that year. We are grateful for the gifts given to this fund and for Kathy’s continued interest.

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