



The Ghost Writer

DECEMBER, 2009

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturday
4th Tuesday

starting November 14 through April
Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child
Reservations Required.
Phone (239) 695-1023 or email
islandgirm@msn.com

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

1st Saturday

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

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2nd Saturday, 3rd Tuesday

If you can help, phone (239) 695-1023.

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, December 13, 2:00 p.m.
Port of the Islands

"SEASON STARTER"

Sunday, December 13, 5:00 p.m.
Port of the Islands
See page 3

AMAZING ADVENTURES

"Kayaking the Mississippi"

Tommy Owen & Charles Vaught
Friday, January 8, 6:30 p.m.
See www.rookerybay.org

JSD Delays

There are plans to replace the culverts on Janes Scenic Drive. Be prepared for delays, especially during working hours in the week days.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 11/4/09, Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, and Alicia Campanella, Park Ranger, observed **chicken turtles** on Janes Scenic Drive (JSD) around Gate 3 and Gate 12, respectively. On 11/5/09, in the morning, George Quarm, visitor, observed a **Florida Black Bear** and, in the mid-afternoon, he observed a **Florida Panther** about 80-100 pounds on JSD around Gate 16. On 11/5/09, in the morning, Ron Kotliar, volunteer, observed one **Limpkin** feeding in the ditch near the end of JSD. On 11/6/09, near Gate 7, Richard Fagan also saw a **Black-throated Green Warbler** male perched in a Cypress tree. On 11/6/09, Mike Owen, Park Biologist, and Richard Fagan observed a **Cooper's Hawk** perched in a Red Maple also around Gate 7. On 11/8/09, Mike Owen and Donna Glann-Smyth, volunteer, observed a male **Everglades Snail Kite** flying to ESE into the wind in the first part of JSD. Later that day, on a tree, they saw a **Fish-eating Spider** eating a tree frog in the swamp. On 11/9/09, a **River Otter** was observed by Ron Kotliar and Richard Fagan crossing JSD.

On 11/15/09, in the early morning, Alan Murray, volunteer, observed an **American Bittern** flying over the prairie south of US 41 across from the Boardwalk. On 11/15/09, in the early afternoon, Yuko Sakano, visitor, observed a **Florida Black Bear** around 250 pounds on JSD. On 11/15/09, Chris Little, volunteer, and Richard Fagan observed a **Peregrine Falcon** perched on dead snag near the Carnestown (US-41 & SR-29) gas station on their way to Fakahatchee. On 11/15/09, in the early afternoon, Robert Fields, visitor, observed an **Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake** near the border of Fakahatchee and Picayune.

On 11/22/09, Jackie Masar, volunteer, observed an adult **Bald Eagle** flying over US-41 just west of Carnestown. On 11/22/09, while hiking on East Main/Gate 12, Nelson and Caryl Tilden and Jerry Winters and Signe Backus saw a **Water Moccasin**, **Florida Banded Water Snake** and a **Yellow Rat Snake**. They also saw **Tiger Swallowtail Butterflies**, **Zebra Long-Wings** and adult **Lubber Grasshoppers**. On 11/23/09, in the morning, Renee Rau, Park Manager, and Misty Miller, Administrative Assistant, saw a **Bobcat** around the Harmon Lake, a **Water Moccasin** just past the Harmon Shop building and two juvenile **American Alligators** just before G15. On 11/27/09, in the mid-afternoon, Richard Fagan observed a **Short-tailed Hawk** and 14 **Wood Storks** flying over Gate 16 on Mud tram.

On 11/29/09, in the early morning, Alan Murray observed 5 **American Goldfinches** and heard a **Sora*** across from the Boardwalk at Weaver's station and saw a **Roseate Spoonbill** fly over the parking area of the boardwalk. On 11/29/09, in mid morning, Kathy Hatch, volunteer, saw 2 **Loggerhead Shrikes** in Dan House Prairie. On 11/29/09, in the afternoon, Donna Glann-Smyth observed a **Rough Green Snake** in the drive in front of the Park Headquarters.

*A **Sora** is a rail. It can be seen or near freshwater or salt marshes or in narrow marsh edges. It is chunky and short-billed. The adult has a black face contrasting with a rich brown back, gray chest, yellow bill. Its voice is a clear whistle that rises at end "surrrrr-eeeeee". It also has a sharp "keek" and sharp descending whinny "keeheheheheeh".

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

Weevils, Flies and a Big Surprise

by Dennis Giardina

On Wednesday, July 14, Mike Owen and I met Dr. Ron Cave from the University of Florida Bio-control Research Laboratory and his assistant, Bradley Smith, to make the fifth release of *Lixadmontia franki*, the parasitic fly that we hope will slow down the spread of Mexican bromeliad weevils throughout the Fakahatchee Strand. It was a beautiful late afternoon and it took us about a half an hour to reach an area that based on our surveys, was within the advancing front of an active weevil invasion. Dying bromeliads indicated that there were plenty of plump weevil larvae inside them for the flies to parasitize.

To recount a little bromeliad weevil history for those who are unfamiliar: In the late 1980's, a batch of weevil-infested bromeliads from Southern Mexico were delivered to an ornamental bromeliad grower in Broward County. They spread from the grower's facility out into the natural areas of South Florida, wiping out populations of our native bromeliads. In 2002, Mike Owen found weevils in the Fakahatchee Strand. In 2004, I watched bromeliad weevils spread across the eastern side of the Panther Refuge into the upper Fakahatchee Strand. In 2005, while standing below a once-lush colony of bromeliads reduced to almost nothing, I vowed I would do all I could both personally and professionally to help find a solution.

In April of 2007, Mike Owen and I entered Fakahatchee through a hole in the I-75 fence to check on and pollinate two cigar orchids, the largest and rarest species in the Preserve. At one time there were thousands of these big, beautiful orchids with dangling sprays of yellow and red flowers. Cigar orchids were highly prized and were removed from Fakahatchee almost to the point of extirpation. As we walked along that day, we noted how nice and healthy the colonies of big bromeliads were in that area. So much so that we set up three plots and quantified the number of species and individuals within them. A year later when we returned to revisit the cigar orchids along the same route, we found bromeliads in and around our plots dying. We tore apart one particularly peeked plant and found both adult and larval bromeliad weevils inside. I don't know about Mike, but echoing inside my head were the screams of Fay Wray, the sirens of French police cars, and the sound of shattering glass.

I quickly contacted Dr. Cave and asked that fly releases begin at Fakahatchee. It took almost ten years of working with these flies in quarantine before official permission was given to release them in 2007. They are specialists and cannot

complete their life cycle on any other host organism except bromeliad weevil larvae and that was proven time and again in the laboratory. The flies have been repeatedly released in batches of between 50 to 100 individuals in many different natural areas, including Big Cypress National Preserve and Collier-Seminole State Park. If they are able to survive and reproduce, they will never exterminate bromeliad weevils but they may be able to reduce their numbers to a level where bromeliads, weevils, and flies can all exist in a kind of ecological balance.

After Ron and Bradley released their flies, I turned on my GPS to help get us back to my truck. The sun was beginning to set as I started to guide us through the swamp. Mike always stays behind, noting whatever pertinent ecological features he encounters. He is the most thorough documenter of the natural environment that I have ever met and the data that he has collected over the past 15 years is so important. A hundred years from now, biologists will not have to wonder as we do about the Fakahatchee of the past – Mike's notes will tell them in meticulous detail. I looked back and hooted to Mike to see how far behind he was. I was concerned that it would be dark soon.

As I listened for his reply, I looked up and saw something that about made my jaw hit the ground. Fifteen feet up a cypress tree, completely encircling it was the largest cigar orchid I had ever seen. I called out, "Mike! Come quick; you're not going to believe this." With wide eyes and a quizzical smile he approached me and leaned on the cypress tree. I pointed for him to look up and when he did, he threw up his arms and yelled, "Touchdown!" I said, "Take a closer look." It was then that he saw the really remarkable thing, a seed pod, and the first evidence of natural reproduction of a cigar orchid in Fakahatchee. This is only the 19th known cigar orchid currently extant in Fakahatchee and it may be 50 years old.

Next month I will write more about cigar orchids in Fakahatchee and a partnership with Atlanta Botanical Garden that will attempt to restore colonies of them.



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.

IN THE NEWS

Allison Nist, a former FOF director, has been honored by having her poem "In the Fakahatchee" included in Clyde Butcher's new book *Big Cypress Swamp; The Western Everglades* which is now available. For more info about the book and Clyde's pictorial calendar for 2010, see www.clydebutcher.com or phone (239) 695-2428.

"It's a beautiful film that resonated with our audiences", said Ellen Goldberg, Senior Program Director of the Naples International Film Festival, about "Big Cypress Swamp; The Western Everglades" which won the NIFF Audience Award in early November. FOF helped to sponsor the production. Congratulations to Elam, Clyde, and the gang.

President's Message

The first-ever Fakahatchee Coastal Cruise was a well-attended and enjoyable event. There were 33 folk who listened to Marya Repko give a brief history of the Fakahatchee. After lunch, several visited the Museum of the Everglades and then went on to the boat.

Captains Ken and Paul from Everglades National Park Boat Tours provided the interesting narrative of the 10,000 Islands on the way to Fakahatchee Island. We were fortunate to have a pair of Bottle Nose Dolphins give us a show, frolicking in the boat's wake, and later a squadron of huge White Pelican's in formation overhead!

Landing on Fakahatchee Island gave us an appreciation of how conditions must have been in the 1890's when it was settled. The shell mound has a jungle of prickly pear cactus and a variety of other flora. Our trail took us to the old cemetery that spoke of the hardship and history of the island. Along the way Glen Stacell and Mike Owen pointed out some of the more interesting plants. Our return cruise took us past a couple of rookeries filled with Ibis; Brown Pelicans and a close up of some beautiful Roseate Spoonbills.

Follow-up comments suggest that the Friends plan a similar Cruise in the future. Many "THANX" to Marya Repko for putting together the logistics of the Cruise and to past Prez John Elting who conceived the whole idea. "THANX" also to Phill Lawry & Paul Cameron for one of the work boats and to Tom Leonard for the other one on November 14 when a crew consisting of Saul Friess, Karen Relish, Jim & Niki Woodard, Marya Repko, and Tom Maish paved the way by clearing brush and marking the path.

Look forward to seeing you at the "Season Starter" Dinner on Sunday, December 13 at Port of the Islands,

Tom Maish

BOARDWALK REPORT

Caryl and I are happy to be back after a few months away. We are pleased to welcome Kathy Hatch as a new Boardwalk interpreter. Kathy is a former FOF board member and long-time Fak volunteer.

The number of visitors has been steadily increasing and we anticipate, if history is any guide, that nearly 50,000 people will visit the Boardwalk over the next five months. Visitors this month will see the Boardwalk at one of its best times of the year – lots of water, lush vegetation, and many birds and animals to observe. The water level appears to be nearly as high as previous years. The gator hole has experienced major growth in vegetation, especially alligator flag, and has a new viewing treat, a large hive of bees which have built a nest across the gator hole from the observation platform.

Our pair of bald eagles has returned and is in the nesting process. We anticipate having eaglets hatch around the middle of January, and it would be typical to begin viewing the chicks by early to mid-February. Our osprey nest on the east side of the boardwalk is also occupied again.

We got a report and many photos (and video) from birding expert, Allen Murray, of a hummingbird that built a nest and raised at least one chick near the end of the Boardwalk this summer. Allen also documented on video the building of an alligator nest within a few feet of the end of the Boardwalk. So far, we have not had any sightings of new immature alligators.

If you have not visited the Boardwalk lately, please come and enjoy it!

Nelson and Caryl Tilden
Volunteer Naturalists



Friends of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve

P.O. Box 35, Everglades City, FL, 34139
www.friendsoffakahatchee.org

Cordially invite you to join us in "Season Starter" celebration.

Sunday, 13 December 2009

5:15 PM – Greet old friends and meet new ones at an informal wine reception

6:00 PM – Four-course seated dinner

7:00 PM – "Pythons in Our Midst"

**An illustrated program presented by
Larry Perez, Science Communication Outreach
Everglades National Park**



**Port of the Islands, Tamiami Trail, East Naples
\$23.00 per person**

*Please make your reservations by Wednesday, December 9,
at (239) 695-2905 or FOF_90@hotmail.com*

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 252 members. *The Ghost Writer* is sent by email to 223 members, saving about \$98 per issue. Renewals for the first quarter for 2010 will be sent at the beginning of January.

Welcome to new member:
Dick Brewer, Naples

We had this email titled "One Lucky Egret" from Nelson Tilden:

On November 27 Caryl and I were driving north on Janes Scenic Drive with FOF friends Gary and Judy Kniffen about 10am with the intent of hiking on East Main tram from gate 12. Just before reaching K-2 we noticed a Great Egret hanging upside down with one leg entangled in a vine. It was not moving and appeared to be dead, but since it was only about 8 feet above the ground we decided to cut it down. When we approached it began to move, although feebly. After a few minutes we were able to cut the vine and the egret dropped to the ground. Gary put a towel over the bird and we lifted him into the water beside the road. Within 2 or 3 minutes the egret stood up straight and began to walk through the water in a normal fashion. We lost sight of him but hoped he was lucky enough to be able to fly another day.

A tour of Orchids & Bromeliads in Ecuador. January 15-28, is available at www.southamericanaturetours.com or phone Guillermo Rivera at (941) 447-2160.

FOF at Art-in-the-Glades

Members Jay Staton and Marya Repko will be at the arts & crafts sale on **Saturday, December 5**, in Everglades City where they will be offering the "Fakahatchee Feast", a gift pack combining Jay's DVD "Catching the Fak-a-Habit" and Marya's new book *A Brief History of the Fakahatchee*.



The event is open from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and takes place in McLeod Park next to Everglades City Hall. The new FOF Tshirts and hats will also for sale. For more info, phone Marya at (239) 695-2905.



*Holiday Greetings
and Best Wishes for
A Peaceful New Year*

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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| | Susan O'Farrell | David Shindle | Glenn Stacell | 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)

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MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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