

The Ghost Writer

SEAFOOD FESTIVAL SPECIAL, FEBRUARY 2004

Newsletter of Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve
HOME OF THE GHOST ORCHID

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Seafood Festival

Saturday/Sunday, February 7/8
Everglades City

MEET OUR GUESTS:

Author Phil Huston
Photographer Connie Bransilver

Native American & Pioneer Festival

Saturday/Sunday, February 21/22
Collier Seminole State Park, US41/SR92

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

FEB 3, 21, 24 • MAR 2, 30
reservations: (239) 695-4593 • fee: \$15 (\$10 FoF)

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

FEB 7, 28 • MAR 6, 27
reservations: (239) 695-4593 • fee: \$25 (\$20 FoF)
Equipment provided; limited to groups of 10

STAR GAZING

Courtesy of Everglades Astronomical Society
next event in March, phone (239) 537-6680
Meet at dusk, Park Office, telescope provided

Miami Orchid Show

Saturday/Sunday March 6/7
Dinner Key Auditorium, Bayshore Drive, Coconut Grove
We need volunteers for our booth!

Grand Opening: Environmental Center

Rookery Bay, 300 Tower Rd, Naples
Saturday/Sunday March 20/21
phone (239) 417-6310 or see www.rookerybay.org

M O • Z O N E

SEEN AROUND THE STRAND

Wood Storks, an endangered species, have been seen in numbers this month. Known as the "barometer of the Everglades" these tactile feeders appear as the water levels drop between January and May – unless it is kept artificially high by water management. The stork's bill snaps shut within 1/40th second after fish or crayfish touches the inside of the open bill as they shuffle in the mud. Mike Owen reports sightings of 40 on Jan 21st and over 150 on Jan 25th.

Roseate Spoonbills, who snap up their food even faster, were seen by Barbara Lewinski on US41 3 miles west of SR29 in the late afternoon of Jan 23rd. More unusually, Kathy Hatch spotted 3 **Flamingos** on Jan 10th flying west of Port of the Islands. These colorful birds mostly live near Florida Bay where their population is about 40.

Kathy, who also lives in Montana, is a volunteer. She records road kill on Janes' Scenic Drive and observes wildlife in the Preserve once a week. About half of the recorded road kill consists of **snakes**, some deliberately run over as witnessed by the swerving tracks left by offending vehicles. She saw an **Everglades Mink** on Jan 26th running near Gate 12 with something in its mouth (either prey or a baby).

Other sightings were: 2 **Wood Duck** flying from the North Ditch of West Main on the morning of Jan 20th by Rangers Steve Houseknecht and Dave Henley; 2 **American Bittern** during the canoe trip led by Ranger David Henley on the East River on Jan 3rd around noon, 70 **Great Egrets** and 2 **Snowy Egrets** seen by Mike and Karen on Jan 21st north of Gate 1.

Mike thinks that we have not seen as many mammals in the Preserve this month because of the cold weather. However, Mike did see one set of **Florida Panther tracks** on West Main on Jan 28th after the rain on the previous day.

If you would like to volunteer for wildlife observation or have anything to report, phone Mike Owen, Fakahatchee's resident biologist, at (239) 695-2886

What Are We? Who Are We?

The Friends of Fakahatchee State Preserve is a Citizen Support Organization of the 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 I75, US41 and SR29.

OFFICERS: President – John Elting Vice-President – Allen Caldwell
Secretary – Betty Foster Treasurer – Jack Horner

BOARD: Franklin Adams Signe Backus Jan Brock Elsa Caldwell
Patty Huff Allison Nist Greg Toppin Jerry Winters
Jim Woodard Niki Woodard

Visit our website www.friendsoffakahatchee.org for the latest news about events and for copies of newsletters.

"I Feel Exquisite Joy In The Presence Of The Forest"

Connie Bransilver's beautiful photographs of orchids and wildlife, some of them taken in our own Fakahatchee Strand, will be on sale at the FOF booth at the Seafood Festival. She will be available on Saturday, February 7, to talk about her pictures and sign copies.

Connie, who has traveled widely and received numerous awards, lectures on conservation and publishes her work in various books and periodicals. Visit her website www.ConnieBransilver.com to read about her achievements and to view her pictures before meeting her.

Membership News

About 50 members and guests enjoyed the sunny weather and delicious food during the Annual Picnic and Members' Meeting at Arthur's Camp on January 24th. The new Board of Directors and Officers are listed in the panel on the front page.

We have 226 members! And, the numbers continue to grow. Their **geographical distribution** is: Naples (62), Everglades City (19), Miami (18), Sanibel (14), Fort Myers (12), Bonita Springs (10) and Marco Island (10), Chokoloskee (9), plus others from further afield and out of state. This spread certainly shows a broad interest in the importance of Fakahatchee Strand. To date, 129 members communicate by email, saving us over half of our postage costs. *If we do not have your email address, please send it to FOF_90@hotmail.com*

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Mary Cronin (Dallas),	J&P Dougan (Marco)	K&D Hyry (Everglades City)
L LaGorce (Sanibel)	M Magee (Naples)	F Martin (Bonita Springs)
R&K Pagac (Naples)	K Piotrovicz (FtMyers)	J E Ryan (N. Ft Myers)
L Schenkot & L Veigel (Naples)		R Yates (Atlanta)
Jim Nottingham, Coccoloba Chapter of Florida Native Plant Society (N. Ft Myers)		

BOARDWALK NEWS

Jerry Winters and Signe Backus report that they have been serenaded each Saturday around 4:00p.m. by a pair of **Barred Owls**. The **Bald Eagle** is resident in the nest, and a **Blue Heron** has established fishing rights near the otter pond. There are adolescent **alligators** in the pond at the end of the Boardwalk and evidence of **deer** has been reported.

Several new volunteers have come forth but if you can spare a morning or afternoon to greet visitors at the Boardwalk entrance (US41, 8m west of SR29) phone Jerry or Signe at (239) 389-7384.

Thanks

To Arnie Ackerman and his firm Print Power of 7084 NW 50th Street, Miami, for printing our newsletter and membership brochures.

To Dennis Marlin who donated his time and equipment at the Harmon Site on January 25th when 46 Royal Palm and Paurotis Palm trees were planted. Also, to Elliot Mascoop, Frank Denninger and Budd Scott for their help.

To Greg Toppin and the rest of the crew for organizing a fantastic picnic for us and to all who brought side dishes to share.

Book Review

by Marya Repko

Among my light holiday reading was a "who done it" set in our corner of Southwest Florida. Philips Huston's novel *Alarm Cry* describes an investigation into the disappearance of a noted birdwatcher, probably not far from the borders of Big Cypress and Fakahatchee.

The heroine is a deceptively mousy school teacher (shades of Miss Marple?) who has towed her AirStream down from Michigan for a 6-month stint of recording bird calls. She soon joins an elite group of five other amateur ornithologists, from all walks of life, who meet informally to tromp the local swamps and hammocks in search of rare birds. They all seem to be reluctant to talk about a previous member who never returned after a foray into the woods several years ago.

In classic detective-story format, suspicion falls on each of the group until her meddling, aided by the local sheriff, finally unhinges the murderer in a dramatic final scene.

The author, a trail guide at the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and an avid birder himself, moves the plot along at a sedate pace, pausing en route to describe the area and its avian inhabitants. All in all, a good read and a fun challenge to guess at the location of the places he describes.

Phil Huston will be signing copies of his book on the FOF booth at the Seafood Festival on Saturday, February 7.



Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc.
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