

The Ghost Writer

SPRING ISSUE, MARCH 2004

Newsletter of Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve

HOME OF THE GHOST ORCHID

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Board Meeting

Friday, April 9th at 6:00p.m.

Seafood Depot Restaurant, Everglades City

RSVP to (239) 695-4593

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

Last of Season: MARCH 30

reservations: (239) 695-4593 • fee: \$15 (\$10 FoF)

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

Last of Season: MARCH 27 – FULL!

reservations: (239) 695-4593 • fee: \$25 (\$20 FoF)

Equipment provided; limited to groups of 10

STAR GAZING

Courtesy of Everglades Astronomical Society
for details of next event, phone (239) 537-6680

Meet at dusk, Park Office, telescope provided

Grand Opening: Environmental Center

Rookery Bay, 300 Tower Rd, Naples

Saturday/Sunday March 20/21

phone (239) 417-6310 or see www.rookerybay.org

SEEN AROUND THE STRAND

M

Mike saw a “first” for him, a **White Crowned Pigeon** actually eating berries on a Dahoon holly (the real Florida holly) near the approach to the Boardwalk on Feb 16th at 2:30 in the afternoon.

O

American Bitterns were observed by ranger Steve Houseknecht on Feb 20th on the second prairie 1.5miles past the fire tower and by member Bob Czarnecki on Mar 7th 12mile north of the first gate.

•

Z

Visitors from Massachusetts, Grace Peters and Jean Chandler, spotted an **Everglades Mink** on Mar 8th between Gates 3 and 7.

O

Karen and Mike counted at least 10 **Black-Necked Stilts** (with their distinctive long pink legs) at 10:50a.m. on Mar 12th in the swamp south of US-41, a mile west of SR-29. Mike had also seen some several days previously.

N

Mike is looking out for **Ghost Orchids** plants so that he can lead walks in July and August when the mosquitoes are not so prevalent (as the summer rain fills their breeding grounds, fish come in and eat the eggs).

E

To volunteer for wildlife observation or to report sightings, phone Fakahatchee’s resident biologist **Mike Owen** or **Karen Relish** on (239) 695-2886



Photo Courtesy of Allen Caldwell

Annual Picnic, January 24, 2004



Photo Courtesy of Allen Caldwell

Seafood Festival, February 7/8, 2004

What Are We? Who Are We?

The Friends of Fakahatchee State Preserve, a 501(c)3 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 and SR-29.

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.

Letter from John Elting, President of FoF

As your newly elected president, I want first to thank all members and volunteers for their time, effort, and dedication to the Fakahatchee, one of the truly unique places on this planet. I have known the Fakahatchee for almost 40 years and, as the pressures of human encroachment increase unrelentingly, the value of such a place becomes almost incalculable.

We, the Friends, have assumed the responsibility bestowed upon us by Mel Finn. As John Mistletoe said, To be deeply rooted in a place that has meaning is perhaps the best gift a person can have. If that place has beauty and a feeling of permanence it may suggest to him, unawares, that sense of identity with this physical earth which is the humblest and happiest of life's intuitions.

Your new president is a swamp rat. I take great pleasure and satisfaction in leading swamp walks: exposing to any and all the beauty and history of the Fakahatchee, for I believe that education – first hand exposure – and the commitment to explore wild areas is the key to saving them. A heightened awareness can lead to preservation, and preservation in our primary mandate as a Citizens' Support Organization of the Fakahatchee.

Your board is in the process of implementing several changes to take effect during the coming year.

- First, we are switching the date of our annual meeting to coincide with our fiscal year which ends in April. This will make the budgeting process easier and will enable the board of directors to more effectively fulfill their obligations.
- Second, we are implementing additional safety measures for the boardwalk and swamp walks. Radio cell phones and mandatory CPR and first aid training will be added.
- Third, we will be making a concerted effort to increase our volunteer participation. We are calling upon all members to participate as volunteers in a number of areas including guiding, clerical help, events, promotion and, most importantly, exotic plant removal. In early October we will institute a "Volunteer Day" which will consist of a picnic with T-shirts and the opportunity for all members to sign up for forty hours of volunteer work during the months of October through April. We urge everyone in the area to participate in one activity or another. Note: you may call prior to October!
- Fourth, we hope to include notable speakers from other CSO's or environmental groups to address our membership meetings.
- Last, we will be updating our web site and newsletter to better convey the schedule of upcoming events.

Financially, we are in good shape as we continue to add new members and receive revenue from swamp walks and the boardwalk. That said, increased contributions are welcomed and necessary as it is our hope to add a new biology/volunteer center in the not so distant future.

Again, thank you all for your continuing support and, please, let's make a concerted effort in the coming year to increase our commitment to the preservation of this magnificent preserve.

Meet the Board

President John Elting, from New York, was an investment banker and still holds corporate directorships. Also active in Sanibel community and naturalist causes, leads swamp walks through the Fakahatchee.

Vice-President Allen Caldwell, from Southern Florida, is a founder member of FoF. He was a microbiologist but now spends time volunteering in Miami for the homeless, studying local history and supporting the arts.

Secretary Betty Foster, from near Springfield, Ohio, was a buyer in her local department store. Now a volunteer for the Elks and visitor to the Glades.

Treasurer Leonard (Jack) Horner, from Toledo, Ohio, worked for Michigan Consolidated Gas. "Retired" to become a ranger at Koresham State Park and an interpretive naturalist for Lee County. Now devotes spare time to Florida Trail Association.

Elsa Caldwell, from Miami, is another founder member. Held high positions as a clinical chemist and educator. Fluent in French and Spanish, interested in historic preservation and our ecology.

Jerry Winters, from New York City, had a career in welfare and health care, eventually moving to Minnesota where he met Signe.

Signe Backus, from Illinois, has a degree in park design and owned fine arts & crafts galleries in Minnesota and Wisconsin, where she & Jerry spend their summers.

Jim Woodard, from Southern Florida, is attorney specializing in criminal defense; was Assistant State Attorney. Now has a practice in Coconut Grove.

Nicole (Niki) Woodard, from Michigan, was a police officer for the Metro Dade Sheriff.

Patty Huff, from Nashville, worked in health care and as an investment advisor. Avid long-distance cyclist and usually busy with local ECity activities.

Capt. Franklin Adams, from Miami, was in the US Army Corps of Engineers, then involved in corporate management and was an Audubon warden. Restored historic boat in ECity for charter sports fishing; also active in conservation, Everglades restoration.

Allison Nist, MD, from Buffalo, NY, is Clinical Director of Collier County Health Dept in Naples and Immokalee, specializes in HIV/AIDS, but continues to write poetry and appreciate the arts.

Greg Toppin, from Ohio, is Manager of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve. Has been with Florida State Parks for 25 years. Hobby, when not out in the swamp, is woodworking.

BOARDWALK NEWS

Further to John Elting's letter (see above), Jerry Winters & Signe Backus, Caryl & Nelson Tilden, and Bill Mesce were trained in **CPR and First Aid** by ranger Buddy Griner. We also now have cell phones. **T-shirts** are for sale at the Boardwalk (and at the office) at \$18 including sales tax. The usual adult sizes are available.

We have a **barred owl** that "talks" to us. A visitor with Caryl & Nelson made the usual "who-who" sounds and the owl answered him back several times. The owl (suggestions for a nickname?) always comes to the same roost during the day time so if you're good at hooting, you can try your luck.

Our mother **alligator** is taking good care of her 20 babies (out of about 50 eggs). They are about 10-inches long. She also has 18-inchers from last season around her. The **bald eagles** stay away from the nest but linger on nearby trees so we wonder if their offspring either did not hatch or were attacked.

New volunteers Caryl & Nelson spend several days a week on the Boardwalk and, besides talking to tourists, record bromeliads and orchids for Mike Owen.

If you can greet visitors at the Boardwalk entrance or have anything to report, phone Jerry or Signe at (239) 389-7384 or Mike at (239) 695-2886.

Thanks to Virginia and Curt Hatheway for the time they have spent as friendly, welcoming greeters at the Boardwalk.

Thanks to all the snow birds for their help and support. Have a good summer ... see you next year! And, please, *send us your email address*.



Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc.
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