



# The Ghost Writer

APRIL 2006

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc.

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

April 4, 8, 15, 22, May 2, 13  
reservations required!  
phone (239) 695-4593

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

for schedule and reservations  
phone (239) 695-4593

### ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC

Saturday, April 1, at 11:00a.m.  
reservations required!  
phone (239) 695-2905  
or email FOF\_90@hotmail.com

### ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING

Saturday, May 6, at 10:30a.m.  
Port of the Islands  
phone (239) 695-2905

*"Two-Wheeling New Zealand"*  
by Tim Andrus, naturalist

Tuesday, April 4 at 7:00pm  
see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)

Smallwood Store 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
*"Seminole Day"*  
*"Killing Mr Watson"*  
Saturday, April 8  
Chokoloskee  
phone (239) 695-2989

## M•O Zone

### SEEN AROUND THE STRAND

There were some interesting wildlife sightings after the burns at the beginning of March. Ranger Steve saw an immature **Bald Eagle**; Dennis & Mike saw a **Coopers Hawk** near the fire tower, Dennis & Steve saw two **Black Rails** in the marl prairie and Mike saw 5 **Tree Swallows**. Among the snakes observed were a **Florida Cottonmouth**, a **Florida Banded Water Snake** and a **Striped Crayfish Snake** (a fairly young one at only 10 inches long). Mike also saw an **Eastern Glass Lizard** near Gate 1 (it is called "glass" because its tail breaks off in defense) and a female **Box Turtle**.

During the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Central Slough Survey on March 7, Mike and son Tommy (now a student at FGCU) saw a **Cuban Tree Frog** by Ballard camp, a female **Merlin** and a **Fall Web Worm**, a small fuzzy caterpillar which seems to appear only every three years.

On March 10, Mike saw a **Striped Mud Turtle**, about 3 inches long, running across Janes Drive and a **Chuck Wills Widow**. He also saw a **Ruddy Dagger Wing** butterfly on Janes, about 3 miles north of Gate 1 and would appreciate hearing if there have been any other sightings.

Four **Deer** (2 buck, one still in velvet, and 2 doe) came up to the shop behind the office to wish Mike a Happy Birthday on March 20; they were first seen by Dennis & Jill and also watched by Steve.

*All of these observations, along with many others, are kept in notebooks. It would be a great help to Mike (and future biologists) if the data could be typed into a computer spreadsheet. Do you know of a student who is looking for something interesting to do this summer? It would be a wonderful learning experience!*

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

**THANKS** to Everglades Island Properties and Snook Publications for reproducing this newsletter.

## LOOKING FORWARD

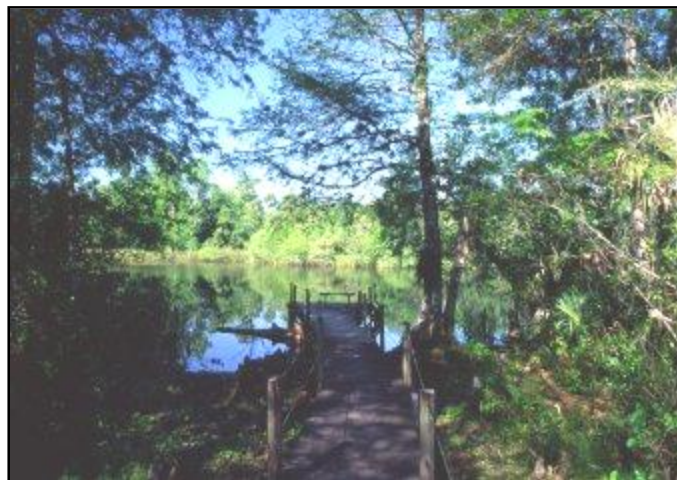
### *Letter from FOF President John Elting*

Recent personnel changes at District 4 of the Park Service and at our own Preserve, where we temporarily lost secretarial help, will certainly slow the implementation of structural changes intended for the Fakahatchee; i.e., new biology space, volunteer space, and maintenance and administration. Also affected would be our combined FOF and Park priorities list. These issues will be sorted out, but it will take some time. In the meanwhile, we the FOF will continue our work to maintain and serve the Park, the boardwalk and to lead our swamp walks. With regard to the latter, our reservation and confirmation process has been interrupted. Hopefully this will be restored shortly but, if not, we will proceed next season with plans presented last year by Tom Maish to use a third-party reservations service to handle our bookings.

I hope next season, and it will probably begin in late October, to augment our interpretive guiding program to include not only the strands but also the prairies and flatwood areas. The Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park offers a literally unlimited learning laboratory and I would like the FOF and biology department to make available as much as possible to interested groups and individuals. I would also like to include some FOF-sponsored trips outside the Preserve to Fisheating Creek or other points of interest. These plans will be discussed at our next two board meetings.

I want to thank those members who filled out and returned the CSO "Priorities List" questionnaire. All items have been noted and will be given due consideration.

*Lastly, I look forward to having a great time April 1<sup>st</sup> with our members and distinguished guests at the Hog Roast Picnic – don't worry other victuals will be served to non-carnivores! Please make arrangements to attend if you have not already done so.*



*photo courtesy Mitch Mitchell*

**The Pond at Ballard Camp, site of the Annual Members' Picnic on Saturday, April 1. To reserve places, contact Marya by phone on (239) 695-2905 or by email at [FOF\\_90@hotmail.com](mailto:FOF_90@hotmail.com).**



**Did you know there is a French pop group with the name "Ghost Orchid"? While we are enjoying our picnic on Saturday, they will be performing in Paris. In an email, they said they chose the name after seeing the film "Adaptation" and that they like "the flower, its meaning and history". They would like to hear from photographers who have spectacular pictures of the orchid. Contact them via their website [www.ghost-orchid.com](http://www.ghost-orchid.com).**



photo courtesy Jim Woodard

## “Be Bear Aware” Campaign

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Big Cypress National Park sent out an information package about black bears with tips about how to avoid them and what to do if you come into contact with one.

Obviously, do not leave out food for pets or birds, put trash cans out the morning of pickup, and clean outdoor barbecues. Bears can smell food from more than a mile away! Intentional feeding of bears is against Florida law.

If you see a bear, avoid eye contact and do not run but back away slowly. A bear that is standing up (as in our photo) is not being aggressive but only trying to see better. If you are inside, try to scare it by making noise.

For more information, see the FWC website [www.floridaconservation.org/bear](http://www.floridaconservation.org/bear).

### Free RV Site for Volunteers

The Park is looking for a couple to help in the office and visitor center next winter. In exchange, these special volunteers can park their trailer or RV near the Park office and hook into the utilities. If you are interested, contact Dennis at (239) 695-4593.



Baby Owl, photo courtesy Nelson Tilden

## BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson Tilden

For the first 19 days of March we have had over 6,300 visitors to the Boardwalk, including two more Elderhostel groups, and the usual large number of European visitors. We continue to have several eco-tour operators making regular daily stops at the Boardwalk and we hear many of them say that the Boardwalk is typically the most popular destination of their day.

We have had a very exciting wildlife observation this month. For the past couple of years we have had a single adult **barred owl** appear from time to time. In early March we observed an entire owl family, including two adults and two very young juveniles that had just fledged. We had the rare chance to see the adults bringing food to the juveniles, and since the juveniles seemed reluctant to fly for several hours at a time, a large number of visitors had a good chance to photograph them. We have had a larger number of **snakes** seen in March than in previous months. We had as many as half a dozen Florida black water snakes on some days and on one occasion we had a 4 foot cottonmouth moccasin lying within a couple feet of the Boardwalk. Visitors have been treated to an unusual number of instances where our 7-to-8 foot female **alligator** has chased a great blue heron, hissing, leaping and snapping in attempts to catch the most typical predator of juvenile alligators. The mystery of the **bald eagles** continues. Visitors occasionally report seeing an eagle on the nest, but there is no evidence of eaglets in the nest.

We are planning a boardwalk work day in the near future. Activities will include the nailing of loose decking boards, of which there are currently many. If you are interested in helping, please contact us

We welcome articles for the newsletter. If you have read a good book that would interest our members or have traveled to another environmentally endangered area, send 300 words or less by post or email.



## ELECTION OF DIRECTORS

The two-year term for some of our directors expires this year but all have agreed to serve on the board again. Those directors to be re-elected are: Signe Backus, Allen Caldwell, Elsa Caldwell, John Elting, Bill Mesce, Allison Nist, Jerry Winters, Jim Woodard, Niki Woodard.

However, if you would like to nominate another person to stand in the election, you can send his or her name with a brief biography to FOF by post or email before April 15. Ballots will be sent to fully-paid members at the end of April and the results announced at the Annual General Meeting.

## BY-LAW AMENDMENT

Due to adverse and non-recurring circumstances, in part caused by Hurricane Wilma and in part by the management transitions at the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, it does not seem prudent or constructive at this time to effect a change of President of Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc. Therefore, the Board of Directors is proposing an amendment to the By-laws extending the current President's term of office, due to end April 30, 2006, to April 30, 2007. This amendment is self-limiting and will expire April 30, 2007.

The By-laws provide that the members be notified when a by-law amendment will be on the agenda at a Board meeting. The proposed amendment will be introduced and voted on by the Board of Directors at the Board meeting of April 1, 2006.

## MEMBERSHIP

We have 229 fully-paid members, plus 47 who are still in arrears from the Fourth Quarter of 2005 and the First Quarter of 2006. *If these lapsed members have not renewed by April 15, they will be dropped from our list.*

### Welcome to new members:

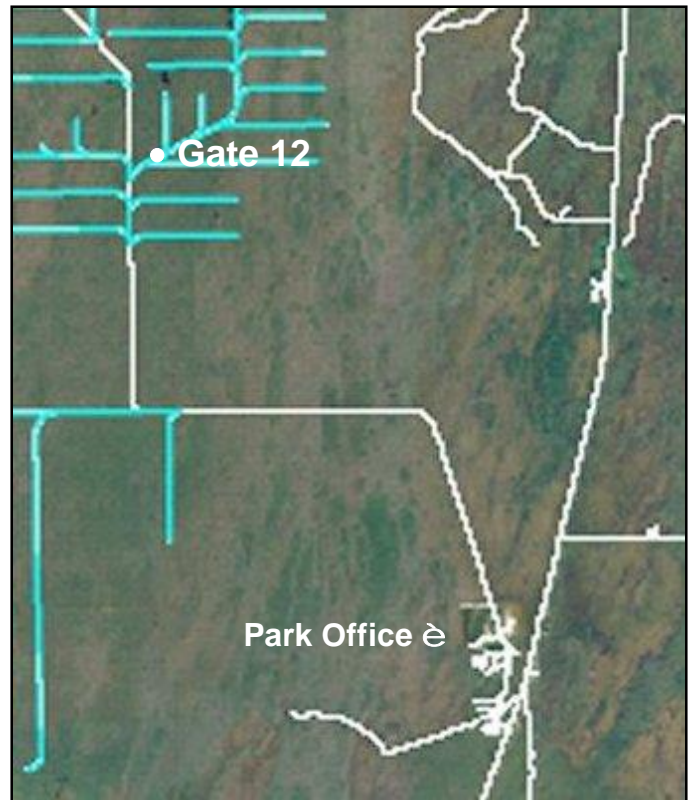
David Bennie, Naples and Townsend, TN  
Jerry Miller, Miami  
Sharon Romich, Sarasota  
Nathan & Jessica Schwessinger, Naples

## ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC

Our picnic this year is on Saturday, April 1<sup>st</sup> and features a pig roast out in the Strand near Ballard Camp on East Main. There will also be guided walks and live music.

Swamp vehicles will convey you from the parking lot at Gate 12 to the picnic site, starting at 11:00a.m.

Gate 12 is about 6.5 miles along Janes Scenic Drive from the Park Office in Copeland.



## What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve**, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation, is the Citizen Support Organization of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, the largest cypress stand 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. Its neighbor north of I-75 is the Florida Panther Refuge, with whom Friends may share associate membership.

*The Ghost Writer* newsletter is edited by Jenifer Adams-Mitchell and Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation over 300 copies. (c) 2006, FOF (all rights reserved).

OFFICERS:      President – John Elting                      Vice-President – Allen Caldwell  
                    Secretary – Betty Foster                      Treasurer – Patty Huff

|        |                        |                 |                   |                |               |
|--------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| BOARD: | Jenifer Adams-Mitchell | Signe Backus    | Connie Bransilver | Allen Caldwell | Elsa Caldwell |
|        | Rick Cruz              | Frank Denninger | John Elting       | William Mesce  | Allison Nist  |
|        | Bud Scott              | Nelson Tilden   | Jerry Winters     | Niki Woodard   | Jim Woodard   |