



The Ghost Writer

APRIL 2007

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

no walks scheduled
because of dry conditions

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

April 7

cost: \$45 (\$40 members)
reservations (239) 695-2440

ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, April 22 at 10:30am
City Seafood, Everglades City

AMAZING ADVENTURES

"Luminous Lizards in Trinidad"
Mike Knight, Corkscrew Sanctuary

Friday, April 13, at 6:00pm
reservations (239) 417-6310
see www.rookerybay.org

AMAZING ADVENTURES

"Swimming with Whale Sharks"
Mike Owen, Fakahatchee Strand

Friday, May 11, at 6:00pm
reservations (239) 417-6310
see www.rookerybay.org

Easter Sunrise Service at Lake Gloria
Sunday, April 8, at 7:00 a.m.
Copeland Baptist Mission

ELECTION DEADLINE!

Friday, April 6 is the deadline for posting ballots for the election of FOF directors. All members in good standing were sent official ballots, with an embossed seal and return addressed envelope, in mid-March. Please exercise your right to vote.

ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING

The Annual Members' Meeting of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc., will be held on Sunday, April 22, at 10:30 a.m. at City Seafood in Everglades City on Begonia Street (first right over the bridge).

The results of the election for 6 directors will be announced at the meeting. The agenda will also include a summary of the year's activities and plans for the future.

A Board of Directors meeting will follow.

PICNIC PICS

Almost 70 people enjoyed the Annual Picnic on Sunday, March 11, in beautiful weather amidst beautiful surroundings at Ballard Camp. Coordinator Elsa Caldwell is thankful to Jenifer Adams-Mitchell, Craig & James Brittain, Rick Cruz, Pam & Bill Mesce, Vicky Nagle, Marya Repko, Marg & Bud Scott, Caryl & Nelson Tilden, Greg Toppin, Publix, Triad Seafood, and WinCar Hardware.



Visitors were taken from Gate 12 to the camp by Troop Carrier and other vehicles.



Food included a roast pig, side dishes, salads, desert, and soft drinks.



Picnic tables in the idyllic setting.



Member Laurie Trayling from England won a photo of a rare Pigmia Orchid donated by Rick Cruz. Raffle organizer Pam Mesce looks on. James Brittain drew the raffle tickets.



Vicky Nagle sold FOF T-shirts & hats.

Visit www.FriendsOfFakahatchee.org for events, newsletter archive, color tram map, history, and more.

Native Orchid Conservation Project by Dennis Giardina

I received an E-mail on November 14th from a Horticulturist named Matt Richards who works at the Fuqua Orchid Center of the Atlanta Botanical Garden, offering to help us with native orchid conservation at Fakahatchee. For those who are not familiar with the Atlanta Botanical Garden, they have one of the largest Orchid species collections and permanent orchid displays in North America. They are also fortunate enough to have a state-of-the-art tissue culture facility in full operation on site. They have done much conservation work with Georgia terrestrial orchids and are involved with conservation programs to get more native material back into the wild. Their most recent project, involving orchids is at Jonathan Dickinson State Park on the conservation of *Tolumnia bahamensis*. They are currently propagating thousands of seedlings in their laboratory for a future reintroduction at that state park and in Palm Beach County, Florida.

I replied that Mike Owen and I would like to talk to him about his very interesting and generous offer. I mentioned that there are a couple of species of epiphytic orchid that were documented in the Fakahatchee Strand, *Bulbophyllum pachyrhachis* (the rat-tailed orchid) and *Epidendrum acunae*, that haven't been seen since the late 1960's. Presumably both species still exist in Cuba and are probably the source of the populations once found here. There is another species, our largest native orchid, *Cyrtopodium punctatum* (the cigar orchid) which was collected heavily in the Fakahatchee Strand in the early part of the 20th Century and is currently extremely rare. Matt has since come to Fakahatchee, met with us, looked over the literature and data, spent some time in the swamp, and has applied for a research permit. We are currently trying to contact scientists in Cuba and our hope is that a botanical garden or university there is cultivating one or both of these species and would be willing to share seeds with us. We are also going to try to collect a fruit of a cigar orchid, growing in the Fakahatchee, to send to the Fuqua Orchid Center to propagate from seed. The goal is to try to increase the number of cigar orchids within the Fakahatchee to improve their reproductive potential and reintroduce the other two "lost" species that belong here.



Cigar Orchid fruit.

BOARDWALK REPORT by Nelson & Caryl Tilden

The Boardwalk is experiencing an large increase in visitors this winter. The final February visitor total was 11,494! March is seeing comparable numbers so far, with some days exceeding 550.

The water level at the gator pond appears to be the lowest in several years. The highly concentrated food supply is making for increased feeding activity by the alligators, and is bringing many wading and diving birds to the pond.

Railing repairs continued this month. FOF board members Bud Scott and Jerry Winters assisted me, along with Tommy Eaton from the District 4 office. New braces were added, along with new tops on the last 100 feet of the Boardwalk.

Both **bald eagle chicks** are continuing their rapid growth. They have grown from a few inches tall to what appears to be nearly 36" in height in just over sixty days. They are spreading and flapping their wings above the nest regularly and the next step will be to hover above the nest for short periods of time. We expect them to make their first flights in early April and perhaps leave the nest by mid-April. We also saw a very young **barred owl** at the end of March on the branch of a dead tree.

One of the more interesting birds found almost daily at the gator pond is the **black-crowned night heron**. In the fall and early winter many visitors mistook the juvenile night heron for an owl, especially when seeing the night heron's back. Now the coloration is changing and the adult plumage is becoming more evident.

We are happy to have Laurie and Tony Trayling joining Signe Backus, Jerry Winters and Bud & Marg Scott as Boardwalk greeters. The greeting function is highly appreciated by visitors and adds greatly to the enjoyment of the Fakahatchee.



Some of the recent brush fires in the Fakahatchee appear to have been arson. If you see anyone acting suspiciously, phone the Park at (239) 695-4593 or the Sheriff at (239) 695-2301.

MANAGER'S REPORT

by Dennis Giardina

During the month of February into early March, our work schedule revolved around two things, prescribed (Rx) burning and capturing panthers. Below is a transcript of an e-mail I sent to District 4 Bureau Chief Valinda Subic that kind of sums it all up:

Valinda,

When I left the field at 9:00 pm, the firefighters were still out working on the Rx burn and I couldn't get an update from them. They all got back around 10:00 pm. Their day was plagued by shifting winds and muddy trail conditions. The shifting winds increased the danger of spot fire considerably and two engines got stuck on the east fire line. Of the 400 acres planned, they burned about 100. They tried to get a permit to finish the burn last night but were denied it because of dispersion considerations. They were directed to extinguish their Rx burn and they did so. Today a huge crew, including PFTC, D-4 Burn Team and firefighters from Lovers Key, Collier and Koreshan (maybe a couple more) returned to finish up the remaining 300 acres of Zone F-1-A5. We have the PFTC here all next week and weather permitting; we will try to knock out a bunch more acreage, including an aerial burn. We have about 6,000 aerial acres prepared and ready to go and another 3,500 almost ready. The rains received and predicted should help to extend out burn season well into March so let's see what we can pull off.

Late yesterday afternoon as the BCNP Capture Team was leaving the Airplane Island area of Big Cypress National Preserve, the veterinarian and houndsman saw two panthers running through an open Prairie. They released the hounds and treed a four-year-old female and her year-old kitten. It was a beautiful, clear early evening and entering the capture site I was given something I hardly ever get, a clear, well-lit shot of a treed panther. The decision was made to capture the mother and leave the kitten. The panther was darted at about 5:30 pm, lost consciousness and hung up in the canopy so it was necessary for me to climb, tie her up and lower her to the ground (hopefully someone will send me a picture of that). When we got her on the ground, we found that she had been handled as a kitten and had a transponder chip. She was the daughter of female FP #93 and male FP #60, born in Big Cypress, March 2003. She is the 150th panther to wear a radio collar since the recovery began.

One last thing to tie it all together: What I told my staff, regarding our separate natural resource objectives was that ideally I wanted to be up in a tree in Big Cypress, lowering a panther to the ground, looking over to the west and seeing a plume of smoke coming up over the horizon. We realized that ideal yesterday!

**Photo by Ralph Arwood of Dennis up a tree with FP #150.
Photo by Dennis Giardina of Fakahatchee OPS Ranger John Klapotsky at a prescribed burn.**

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

On April 22, I will have served my term as president of the Friends of Fakahatchee. Actually, I will have served three terms, two by due process and one via by-law amendment. I want to thank all of you for giving me the opportunity to serve you. I have enjoyed my tenure immensely and hope that in some way I have added value to our organization.

We have a very strong CSO. This is evidenced by our standing in the district and could not have been accomplished without the dedication and support of our membership. I know this dedication will continue in the future as we have a host of challenges ahead of us. Your Board of directors provides outstanding leadership and will deal with these challenges in a timely and thoughtful fashion. We are all indebted to them for their time and effort on our behalf.

The Park needs a lot more assistance from the State. I think that it is vital that we continue to press the State for additional resources to meet demands that will only increase with time. The Park currently operates within a minimal budget. And, it is grossly under-staffed, a situation we would hope to see rectified over time.

Again, I want to thank you all for being members of a great organization and for all your support. I leave you with some choice words from Goethe: "Whatever it is that you can do or wish to do, begin it, for boldness has genius, power, and magic!!"

John W. Elting, President
Friends of Fakahatchee

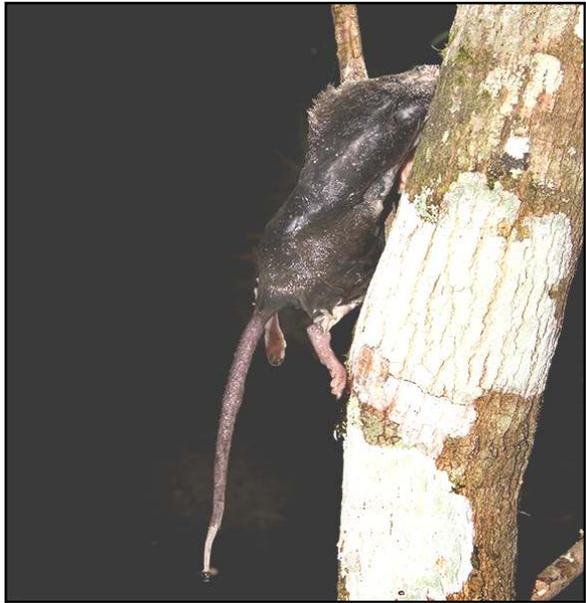


MEMBERSHIP

We have a total of 273 members including 18 who should have renewed in the 1st quarter of this year. Renewal notices for membership due in the 2nd quarter are being sent with this issue of *The Ghost Writer*. The newsletter, in full color, is emailed to 244 members, a saving of \$95 in postage for each issue.

Welcome to new members:

- Art & Nancy Culman, Naples
- Ted & Bonnie Darrow, Columbus, OH
- Derick Driemeyer, Bonita Springs
- Brian & Megan Flanagan, Naples
- Vicky Gannon, Ft Myers
- Hannah & John Ineson, Everglades City
- Larry Mutter, Naples
- William Paquin, Naples
- Betty Patton, Springfield, OH
- Jay & Tracy Slipe, Palm Beach
- Carole Westerfeld & Irvin Buxell, Naples



“LOST FOR WHO KNOWS HOW LONG”

A new discovery by internationally renowned photographer Rick Cruz will be presented, hopefully, with a well-deserved award for this rediscovery.

Rick shares with us this photo of the Rat Tail Orchid (*Bulbophyllum pachyrhachis*) which was thought to be extinct in the Fakahatchee Strand after being lost for more than who even knows but just recently rediscovered.

This orchid is known to exist in only one location in the world and blooms just once a year on the first day of April.

THANKS the Florida Humanities Council for letting us share their evening with Mike Grunwald, author of “*The Swamp*” and an extremely interesting and entertaining speaker about the plight of the Glades through the ages and the current restoration efforts.

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 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, 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 Park, 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 over 300 copies.

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OFFICERS:	President – John Elting	Vice-President – Nelson Tilden			
	Treasurer – Patty Huff	Secretary – Jenifer Adams-Mitchell			
BOARD:	Jenifer Adams-Mitchell	Signe Backus	Allen Caldwell	Elsa Caldwell	Rick Cruz
	Frank Denninger	John Elting	Cathy Hatch	Tom Maish	Bill Mesce
	Bud Scott	Nelson Tilden	Jerry Winters	Niki Woodard	Jim Woodard

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)

NAME _____

EMAIL _____

STREET / P.O.BOX: _____

ALTERNATE ADDRESS

CITY _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

PHONE _____

MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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