



The Ghost Writer

DECEMBER 2006

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st & 3rd Tuesday
2nd, 3rd, & 4th Saturday
starting November 4th
cost: \$35 (\$30 members)
reservations required
phone (239) 695-2440

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

Saturday: Dec 9,
Jan 13, Feb 17, Mar 10, Apr 14
cost: \$45 (\$40 members)
reservations required
phone (239) 695-2440

Annual Birding Festival

January 19-21, 2007
Rookery Bay NERR
registration required
phone (239) 437-6130 ext. 213
see www.rookerybay.org
for a calendar of other talks & walks

"Super Saturday"

Dec 2 in Everglades City
Art-in-the-Glades, 10am - 2pm
Lions Club Turkey Shoot, noon
Historic Buildings Tour, 1pm
Meet the Marco Artists, 2-4pm
phone Marya (239) 695-2905

*We are revising the website
to include improvements.
If you have suggestions,
please email them to the link
on the Contact Us page.*

NEWS FROM THE PARK

by Dennis Giardina, Park Manager

On January 1, 2007, Park Ranger **David Henley** will retire. He has been at Fakahatchee since 1999 and with the Florida Park Service since 1996. David is someone whom I like and respect a lot and I will miss working with him. It will probably take several months to hire a replacement and in the meantime our already insufficient staff will be stretched even thinner.

As a stop-gap measure I am going to employ **John Klaptosky** with OPS funding. John and I worked together at the Panther Refuge for several years and he was a live-in volunteer at Fakahatchee last winter. He has a M.S. in Environmental Studies and he works at Yellowstone National Park during the fair-weather season. He's a good hand and I will invite him to the next board meeting to introduce him to the Directors.

The new **Visitor Information Center** design and construction process is slowly moving forward. John Elting has been negotiating with a contractor who is very reputable but also very busy. We will continue to solicit bids from contractors and hopefully have more to tell next month.

Janes Scenic Drive is passable but its condition is the source of pretty much all of our visitors' complaints. The maintenance of Janes Drive is something I am going to be trying to find a solution to with the District Bureau Chief over the coming year and I would like to discuss this issue with Friends of Fakahatchee Board of Directors at the next meeting. DEP acquired this road from Collier County several years ago and turned it over to the Preserve but has not yet provided a budget to care for it. This status has to change.

Thanks to the Friends of Fakahatchee's generous donation, the new Park **brochures** have arrived. They have been updated with two images from our friends and volunteers Ralph Arwood and Rick Cruz.

Please send your **Volunteer Hours** records by email to FOF_90@hotmail.com (or by post to P.O. Box 35) so they can be recorded for November 2006.

To volunteer for indoor or outside work, phone (239) 695-4593

SEARCHING FOR BROMELIAD WEEVILS IN GUATEMALA

by Dennis Giardina

I am happy to report that my expedition to Central America was successful. In general, I function as a cautious optimist but my expectations were intentionally kept low regarding our chances of finding bromeliad weevil larvae and parasites in Guatemala and then interacting with whale sharks in Honduras.

In the October 2006 *Ghost Writer* I outlined the gravity of the Mexican bromeliad weevil's introduction to Florida and why classical biological control seems to be our best hope to reduce their impact upon the native bromeliad communities of the Fakahatchee Strand.

On November 2nd, Dr. Howard Frank from the University of Florida, Jose Monson from La Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, my adventuresome friend Tim Andrus, and I set out for the Pacific coast of Guatemala, hoping to collect bromeliad weevils and their parasites. We lodged in a coffee plantation and nature reserve called Los Tarrales located on the southern slopes of Volcano Atitlan, surrounded by some of the most beautiful primary rainforest I have ever seen. We planned to use this area as our base and drive to the coastal lowlands during the day but, at least in the areas we searched, there seemed to be few bromeliads there and little safe access to the rivers where the ambient humidity is higher and where they tend to be more plentiful.

We visited another coffee and rubber plantation called Buena Vista near the Mexican border and very close to one of the oldest archeological sites in Central America called Taklik Abaj. Pottery shards and other artifacts seemed to be everywhere as we searched the forested areas around the plantation. We did manage to find a couple of weevil larvae there but an afternoon cloud burst prematurely ended our sweep. As we drove back to Los Tarrales, we discussed the idea of going over to the Caribbean coast to search amidst the bromeliad-laden branches of trees growing along banks of the Rio Dulce. Jose had a connection in the Manatee Preserve there that would let us use a boat and provide us lodging. As I was lying in bed that night thinking about our change of plans it dawned on me, "Wait a minute, we actually found weevil larvae. Why are we going anywhere?"

The next morning at breakfast I asked the team to reconsider our plans to leave the Pacific Coast and recommended that we call the foreman at Buena Vista to take him up on his offer to have his workers collect fallen bromeliads on the ground around the plantation and then we would return in a couple of days to sort through them. In the meantime, I suggested that we do a more thorough job of searching the area around Los Tarrales. They agreed. That afternoon as we walked down a road that would become known as "Weevil Way," I spied some bromeliads on the ground underneath a big tree covered with epiphytes of all kinds. Dr. Frank and I tore into two separate clumps of bromeliads and simultaneously hit the jackpot!

We never could get a phone message to the other coffee plantation but over the next five days we collected over 50 juicy, large bromeliad weevil larvae, several pupae and some adults within a couple of hundred yards of that first find. One afternoon as I sat high in a tree, watching the team and a couple of little Mayan boys attracted by the commotion pull larva after larva from the bromeliads I tossed down to them, I had an almost transcendental experience. I can't quite explain the feeling but it was like a wave of happiness, gratification, and success that made me feel as if I were going to float away. I closed my eyes for a second and lifted my head, smiling so widely that my earlobes may have been in imminent danger, when Dr. Frank called to me, asking me to climb down to look at something. In the palm of his hand was a plump, white grub that was not the larva of a weevil. In a chamber inside the heart of the bromeliad from where he just extracted it was a wad of mush that looked like the remains of a weevil larva. When Dr. Frank examined the mouthparts of the grub he seemed fairly certain it was the larva of a *Hymenopterid* ... a wasp! The circumstantial evidence seemed pretty strong, but did it in fact emerge from the weevil larva mush, killing it before it could pupate or transform into an adult? Could it be that we found the veritable needle in the haystack, a new potential parasite of the Mexican bromeliad weevil? Stay tuned...



Unidentified Larva found on our expedition.

Additionally, Mike Owen and his son Tim and I did rendezvous in Honduras with Ian and Melinda from the Conservancy of SW Florida and Takako and Scott from the 10,000 Islands NWR to help the scientists at the Whale Shark and Oceanographic Research Center collect data on the largest fish in the sea and one of the biggest animals on Earth... more about that in the next installment.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson Tilden

Caryl and I have enjoyed getting back to our interpretation duties at the Boardwalk.

We were immediately struck by the tremendous growth in the understory caused by all the additional sunlight following Hurricane Wilma. The most **remarkable growth** seems to be in the ferns, particularly the leather ferns, many of which are at least seven feet tall. The alligator flag at the end of the Boardwalk has grown so dramatically that viewing by visitors is somewhat more challenging than in past years. Wild coffee plants seem to have thrived unusually well. It is also interesting to see the large amount of new growth of small branches in the bald cypress trees that were so severely "topped" by Hurricane Wilma.

Visitors have been treated to all the usual **bird life**, including great blue herons, great egrets, ibis, anhingas, red-shouldered hawks, kingfishers, green herons, etc, but this year a new attraction has arrived. In our several years of being at the Boardwalk, we had never seen a yellow-crowned night heron until last week. We frequently have black-crowned night herons, both mature and immature, but the yellow-crowned was a new treat. Another first was the sighting of two great horned owls, which we have often heard but never previously seen. As in past years, there have been several sightings of barred owls.

Quite a number of last year's crop of immature **alligators** have been observed, along with our two "resident" adult female alligators. None of this year's newborn alligators have been observed as of yet. We also have seen the first cottonmouth moccasin of the season, a distinctly marked five foot specimen.

One of the fascinating sights on the Boardwalk is the large number of **royal palm trees**. Mike Owen has asked that an annual census of the royal palms that are visible from the Boardwalk be conducted, and this year's survey was different in two respects. In past years it was possible to count royal palms as far away as one hundred feet. This year with the new growth in the understory, it was rarely possible to see more than 30 to 40 feet. Despite the limited visibility, we found more royal palms this year than last. There were several very young plants observed this year. At the last census there were 69 royal palms visible from the Boardwalk, and this year we counted 87. Clearly, they are thriving in the Fakahatchee!

We had a visit by one or two **black bears** the night of November 17. We found two deposits of "scat" on the trail leading to the Boardwalk and very distinct claw marks on the bald cypress trees that are encircled by the Boardwalk. Although bobcat scat is often seen right on the Boardwalk, this is our first observation of bear scat. Visitors will occasionally report seeing a bear around the Boardwalk area in the early morning hours.

Visitors are already increasing in number and, apparently, in generosity. *One kind visitor deposited a \$100 bill in the donation box last week!*

RARE ORCHID FOUND

by Rick Cruz



Great news for Fakahatchee with the rediscovery of the white Clamshell orchid, found by a small group on an expedition deep in the Preserve. The people involved on this amazing find were Russell Clusman, Saul Friess, Jay Staton, and myself.

As beautiful as the Clamshell is in its colors that we are familiar with, burgundy to red and yellow, this rediscovery is breathtaking in rare yellow and white. This species of Clamshell (*Encyclia cochleata*) has not been seen since the early 1960's.

One plant in full bloom was found on this expedition, but on following trips we found two additional plants.

Russell is planning a full story documenting all of our various and rare findings from these expeditions. When done, we will try to get his permission to print it in the *Ghost Writer*.

On other news, I have two exhibits coming up where Fakahatchee will be my main body of work. The first exhibit, Everglades National Park, will be for the month of January. Then in February, I will have a month long exhibit at Big Cypress National Preserve. This is a great opportunity as it is the busiest time of year for both Parks. Exact dates along with the reception nights will be announced in the next issue.

MEMBERSHIP

There has been a question about how many votes different membership categories are entitled to. Our by-laws state "Each Member Category Shall Be Entitled To One (1) Vote". Thus, a family or business has only one vote. If you and your partner want to vote separately, you should take out individual memberships instead of a family membership.

Notices for renewals due in the first quarter will be sent with the January newsletter. The form at the bottom of this issue is for new members. You will notice that the rates have gone up, as agreed by the Board at their May meeting.

Plans are being made for the Annual Picnic in the middle of March when more of our seasonal residents will still be here. We are also working on a series of events with speakers, probably on Friday evenings..

Welcome to new members:

- Jim Sernovitz, Bonita Springs
- James & Katherine Shaw, Sackets Harbor, NY
- Gary & Marcy Wagner, Naples
- Jim & Pam Wood, Naples

**BEST WISHES TO ALL OUR MEMBERS FOR
A HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON !!!**



This photo of a Night Scented Orchid was taken by Jim Woodard near K2 in early November. Jim reported that several weeks later there were none in bloom. He also saw Wild Coco and African Spotted orchids, the latter of which is not a native.

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, SR-29, Fakahatchee Bay, and Picayune State Forest.

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. No part of this newsletter, including pictures, may be reproduced without permission.

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	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	William Mesce	Allison Nist
	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)

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MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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