



# The Ghost Writer

DECEMBER 2007

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

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

every 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday  
price \$40 (\$35 members, \$15 kids)  
**RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!**  
phone (239) 695-2860  
or email: [islandgirlm@msn.com](mailto:islandgirlm@msn.com)

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

2007: Dec 22  
2008: Jan 19, Feb 16, Mar 15, Apr 12  
price \$45 (\$40 members, \$15 kids)  
**RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!**  
phone (239) 695-2860  
or email: [islandgirlm@msn.com](mailto:islandgirlm@msn.com)

### BOARD MEETING

**Sunday, December 16, 10:30 a.m.**  
Pavilion at Big Cypress HQ, Ochopee  
for info, phone 239-695-2346

### Benedict Symposium & Exotic Species Workshop

December 5-6  
see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)

### Words on the Wilderness

**Wednesday, December 12**  
Seafood Depot, ECity, 5:30 p.m.  
see page 4

### Amazing Adventures

**Friday, January 4, 5:30 p.m.**  
see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)

### Annual Birding Festival

**January 18-20**  
Register Now at (239) 417-6310  
see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)

### 19<sup>th</sup> World Orchid Show

**January 23-27**  
see page 2

## M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On Sept 5, Dennis Giardina saw a 2-ft **Rough Green Snake** crossing SR-29 just north of Jones Grade. On Sept 24, Steve Houseknecht watched a **Bald Eagle** chasing an **Osprey** over the Harmon lake and finally grabbing it from above and plunging it into the water. The Osprey had no fish but the Eagle had been there first. The Osprey eventually flew off.

In the evening of Nov 3, Mike Owen saw 2 **Peregrine Falcons** circling over what used to be the Prairie Canal and Mud Tram intersection. On Nov 11 around 7am, Bob Mathewson saw a mother **Black Bear** and her cub 3.1 miles north of Gate 1 off Janes Drive. On Nov 18 at 9:30am. John Ketchen saw a **Red-Shouldered Hawk** diving at an immature **Red-Tailed Hawk** perching on a snag west of Janes Drive about 200 feet north of the old Harmon office. He was with the Florida Master Naturalist group who went on a swamp walk that day.

Caryl and Nelson Tilden reported their boardwalk observations between 11am and 4pm on Nov 13. They saw an adult **Bald Eagle** on a tree 100 yards south of the nest and a **Barred Owl** 200 yards north of the nest. At the gator pond at the end of the boardwalk they saw: 2 **Ibis**, 2 **Great Blue Herons**, 1 **Male Anhinga**, 1 immature **Wood Stork**, several **Red-shouldered Hawks**, 1 **Green Heron**, 2 adult **Alligators**, 5 immature **Alligators** (4 at 14-months old, 1 at 26-months old), and 1 **Great Egret**. On Nov 25, they saw both **Bald Eagles** on a tree just south of the nest.

If you want to report sightings, contact Park biologist Mike Owen or his assistant Karen Relish by phone at (239) 695-2886.

The "Amazing Adventures" Lecture Series will feature extreme bicyclist Tim Andrus on Friday night January 4th at the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center in Naples. A few years ago he cycled alone for six months from Sidney to Darwin, right up through the center of the Australian Outback. His photos, artwork and journal excerpts are worth experiencing. Doors open at 5:30 program begins at 6:30 pm. Tickets are \$5.00. Other lecturers in 2008 include Ralph Arwood on the Galapagos and Karen Relish on South Africa.

The Friends of Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve sent us a link to their website <http://www.sloughpreserve.org/> and their newsletter. The Preserve, which was established by Lee County in 1991, is a narrow 9-mile tract that snakes through built-up areas and under I-75. The visitor center and 1.2-mile boardwalk are off Six Mile Cypress Parkway, north of Daniels Parkway, west of Ft Myers airport, and are open from 8:00 a.m. to sunset. For info, phone (239) 432-2004.



Visit [www.friendsoffakahatchee.org](http://www.friendsoffakahatchee.org) for events, newsletter archive, color tram map, history, and more.

## East Main in August

by Erica Lynne

We left the truck at Gate 12 around 6 a.m. The sky had just started to lighten ... the sun was just waking up. It was already hot and humid. We started sweating almost before we got going. The white moonvine blossoms were still open wide, gracing the bushes on either side of the tram. Our explorations for the day took us far and wide around the East Main tram.

August in the swamp: The pond apples are heavy with fruit. Yellow hog plums splash to the ground. Beauty berry is just beginning to turn its unlikely magenta. Warblers sing high in the trees, but otherwise the birds are largely silent. It is too hot to sing. Sweat runs down our bodies.

The water levels are low. Except near the central slough, the ditches beside the tram are largely dry, piddling little mud puddles here and there. Ballard Pond is low and still choked with gators. There is gator poop beside the pond, and bear poop on the tram. Fresh bear poop, filled with berries. There are also disturbances in the sandy areas ... perhaps a sign of the bear passing by.

We walk in a pond apple/pop ash swam, but there is no water. We climb over downed trees and under brush. The greenbriar is thriving and the hotter and more tired we get, the more it tangles our feet and catches at clothing. Our clothing is now entirely wet ... from sweat, not swamp water.

We found a lush, thriving, bountiful vanilla orchid, verdantly pushing out new green tips of new growth and two seedpods! We stop often for water and to catch our breaths. Our faces are red. Sweat drips into our eyes. It is late now, approaching noon and very, very hot. We want to get out of the swamp before heat stroke sets in, but we need to stop and rest. Something catches our eye, two somethings ... brown/black, round heads, pointy ears, loping gait – not one, but two bears on the tram. They amble off into the swamp.

As we return to Gate 12, we meet the cabin owner coming in. We chat about the changes in the park over the years and as we do, a doe nervously comes up from the west swamp, circles us behind the trees and then passes right in front of us, not more than 10 feet in front of us. She must have had a fawn hidden nearby to be so bold with us. She was red and sleek and well nourished. She walked off to the east, getting on with her day, and we got into the truck to get on with ours. Another wonderful day in the swamp now just in memory.



19TH WORLD ORCHID CONFERENCE® & SHOW

Orchids – Nature's Masterpiece®

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## ORCHID SHOW

by Dennis Giardina, Park Manager

The 19th World Orchid Conference "Orchids – Nature's Masterpiece," will be held at the Sheraton Miami Mart Hotel and Exhibition Center on January 23-27, 2008. Aside from the incredible orchid show, featuring thousands of orchid species for show and sale, there will be three days of lectures. Seventy-two speakers from eighteen countries will speak about the conservation, horticulture and conservation of the orchids of the world and Roger Hammer will give the keynote address. Anyone interested in orchids should consider attending at least one day of this conference. For information, <http://www.19woc.com/home.htm> or 305-662-8024.

Dennis also sent this note by email:

Mike Owen and I helped the renowned painter Angela Mirro with research on her commemorative poster, featuring the orchids and environment of the Fakahatchee Strand. Her original painting will be auctioned and 20% of the proceeds will be donated to the Friends of Fakahatchee. I think she did an excellent job of capturing the feel of the Fakahatchee and the beauty of some of our native orchids, especially the butterfly orchid, *Encyclia tampensis*. You can buy the poster online at the above website.



## President's Message

One of my goals as President this year is to offer more opportunities for the membership to experience the Fakahatchee through volunteer projects or other activities. We got off to a great start on November 3<sup>rd</sup> when 22 people showed up to do a clipping and clean-up project at the Boardwalk. The 22 were composed of 7 board members, several other FOF members and youth. In a couple of hours of work the entire length of the Boardwalk (.6 of a mile) was clipped of overhanging vegetation and swept. The end result was a safer and more attractive environment for our visitors. Thanks to all who volunteered!

I am happy to report that the swamp walk and canoe trip season is well underway. Swamp walks may be scheduled on the first, second and third Saturdays each month, and canoe trips are offered once each month. Places can be reserved by calling Pam Mesce at 239-695-2860. For those of you who may be considering a swamp walk this season, you should know that water levels in the swamp are already declining and that our walks could be curtailed earlier next spring than usual.

Even though Janes Scenic Drive remains very rough, one of the great ways to experience the Fak is to do it by bicycle. If you enjoy bike riding, you may want to join us in early February on a trip down Janes. Anyone wanting to stop at one of the gates to do some hiking would be encouraged to do it. Details will be forthcoming.

If you are interested in volunteering in any way, I encourage you to call me at 239-695-2346 or Dennis Giardina, Park Manager, at 239-695-4593.

See you in the Fak!

*Nelson Tilden*

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Jim Woodard sent this email with photos after a visit to Jones Grade over the Thanksgiving weekend:

As of 11/24, night scented and clam shell orchids are still in bloom. Also, a living "golf ball" is appearing in the ferns. Something, a worm, spider, or ?, is weaving a beautiful cocoon at the tip of the ferns. About the size and shape of a golf ball, sewn together with silk, with a 1/4 inch entrance, is wide spread in the slough.



## BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson and Caryl Tilden

Thanks to all the volunteers who helped to get the Boardwalk looking great and ready for the winter season of visitors! About one hundred people a day are visiting the Boardwalk at this point, and by March the numbers will be over 500. It is good to see the appreciation of the Fakahatchee spread as evidenced by increased use of the Boardwalk by recommendations by tourism bureaus and the eco-tour operators.

The water level along the Boardwalk seemed normal at the beginning of November, but there has been a noticeable decrease in just a past few weeks. Much of the swamp along the Boardwalk now appears dry and the water at the gator pond at the end of the walk appears to be going down somewhat faster than usual. The hydrology of the Fakahatchee is a fascinating thing to our visitors, many of whom are unaware of the normal wet and dry cycles of the area.

For those of you who have not visited the Boardwalk since Hurricane Wilma in October, 2005, you may be surprised to see the growth of ground level plants, especially ferns, resulting from the increased sunlight due to some loss of the bald cypress canopy. We lost many trees and tops of trees during the storm, and the entire length of the Boardwalk showed the effects of Wilma's direct hit. Two years later the rapid growth of the understory makes it hard to see much of the damage.

This next month will see the return of the wading birds to the Boardwalk, particularly as the water to the south of US-41 dries up. One of our two bald eagles has been seen regularly, as has a barred owl and a couple of great horned owls. Two visitors recently reported seeing a black bear, along with several white-tailed deer.

If you have not visited the Boardwalk recently, we hope you will have the opportunity to do so soon. Even with this year's predicted drought, there will be a lot to see! It is really one of the treasures of Southwest Florida.



## MEMBERSHIP

We have a total of 260 members. The newsletter is emailed as a PDF file to 226 members, a saving of over \$92 in postage for each issue. Please send your address if we do not have it.

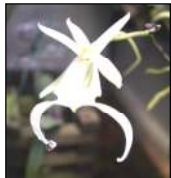
Reminders for the fourth quarter of 2007 are being sent with this newsletter, as are final notices for the third quarter. It is important to renew on time so that our membership list accurately reflects the support we have.

### Welcome to new members:

Brian Johnston, Miami  
 Gary & Judy Kniffen, Naples  
 Vince & Helga Lamb, Merritt Island  
 Carol Swingle, Miami

**THANKS to Richard Wahrenberger of City Seafood for letting us use the restaurant for our Board meeting.**

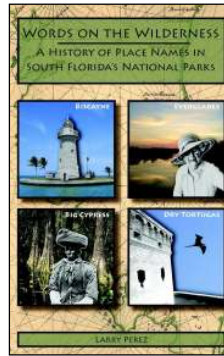
We received this email & photo from Gérald Bonne in France:



I am French and I would like to share with you the photograph of my Ghost Orchid (*Polystichum lindenii*) in flower on September 24, 2007. I am completely fascinated by this plant. I cultivate many other orchids but it is the only one which gives as much pleasure to me. I cannot express the very strong feelings I have at the sight of this flower.

He also said that he hopes to visit some day to walk in the swamp and see the orchid in its natural habitat.

## Author Talks about Local History



Although this new book focuses on Big Cypress and Everglades National Park, the history it describes gives a fascinating picture of southern Florida in pioneering times.

Author Larry Perez has worked for local and national park services near his home town of Miami. He spent three years accumulating the data about the naming of over 400 places and accompanies many of the entries with old photos.

He will speak about *WORDS ON THE WILDERNESS* on **Wednesday, December 12**, at 5:30 p.m. in the Seafood Depot, Everglades City. The event is hosted by the Everglades Society for Historic Preservation but guests are welcome. For info or to make a reservation, phone Marya at (239) 695-2905.



### HOLIDAY GIFT IDEA ...

Use our new full-color mail-order form to buy T-shirts and caps for your friends and family.

*Best Wishes for a Joyful Holiday Season!*

### 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 (Tamiami Trail), 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 Preserve, 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 of over 300 copies.

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## 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