



The Ghost Writer

FEBRUARY 2008

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

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

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

2008: Feb 16, Mar 15, Apr 5
price \$45 (\$40 members, \$15 kids)
RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!
phone (239) 695-2860
or email: islandgirlm@msn.com

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, February 17, 10:30 a.m.
City Seafood, Everglades City
for info, phone 239-695-2346

ANNUAL PICNIC

Sunday, February 10, 11:00 a.m.
Mesce Pavilion, Copeland
RSVP to (239) 695-2905

ANNUAL DINNER

10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Sunday, March 30
Seafood Depot, Everglades City
see next issue for more detail

Jammin' in the Hammock

Blue Grass Festival
Saturday/Sunday, Feb 16/17
Collier Seminole State Park
phone (239) 394-3397 for info

Marjory Stoneman Douglas

Museum of the Everglades
February 26 - March 1
phone (239) 695-0008 for info

See page 4 for more about events

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 12/28/07 Donna Glann-Smyth heard one **American Woodcock** "peenting" in a wet prairie that had been burned two weeks earlier while helping Mike Owen read water levels. On 12/30/07 Dave Mathewson, while hiking, saw a 200 pound **Black Bear** off East Main. During a prescribed burn in the prairies on Dec 10-13 Ranger Steve Houseknecht saw an **American Bittern**, **common snipe**, **glass lizards** and **cottonmouth** off of Janes Scenic Drive. On 1/11/08 in the morning in the East Prairies, Steve saw a male **Northern Harrier** flying less than 10 feet from the ground. On 1/16/08 volunteer Bob Czarnecki and OPS Ranger Karen Relish saw 4 **Hooded Mergansers** with at least 1 male off of Union road. On 1/16/08 Mike Owen saw two **Whip-poor-wills**, a winter visitor to South Florida, in the East Prairies. About sunset, while taking hydrological measurements at the junction of the east edge of the Fakahatchee Strand and the prairies, Mike Owen saw an **American Woodcock** (also called Mudsucker or Timberdoodle) flying and then landing in the nearby area. On 1/17/08 around 11:30AM, Park Specialist Bob Newbould and Chad Lach (Interim Manager) saw 2 **deer** each with a **fawn** off of Janes Scenic Drive near Gate 17. In late afternoon, on 11/21/08 volunteer Jean Stefanik saw a **bobcat** on Janes Scenic Drive. While grading Janes Scenic Drive, on 1/23/08 around 10 AM volunteer Joe Weber had 3 sightings of a **doe** and **fawn** together. In the afternoon, he also saw a **Black bear** North of Gate 12. On the same afternoon, Bob Newbould saw a **Florida panther** south of Gate 12. Bob also reported seeing 2 **black racers** near Gate 19. On 1/23/08 OPS Ranger John Klapotsky and volunteer Nena Huston spotted 4 **raccoons** (1 adult and 3 kits) on Jones Grade west of the Cypress house in a Sabal Palm. They also observed a pod of 3 young **American alligators** approximately 1 foot long off of Jones grade.

We want to thank volunteers Joe and Pat Weber volunteers who have helped us tremendously. They will be greatly missed but we look forward to seeing them again next season!

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

You are invited to the

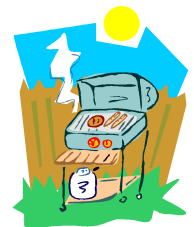
ANNUAL PICNIC

Sunday, February 10th
from 11:00 a.m.

Mesce Pavilion in Copeland

Live Music • Raffle • Great Food!

RSVP to (239) 695-2905



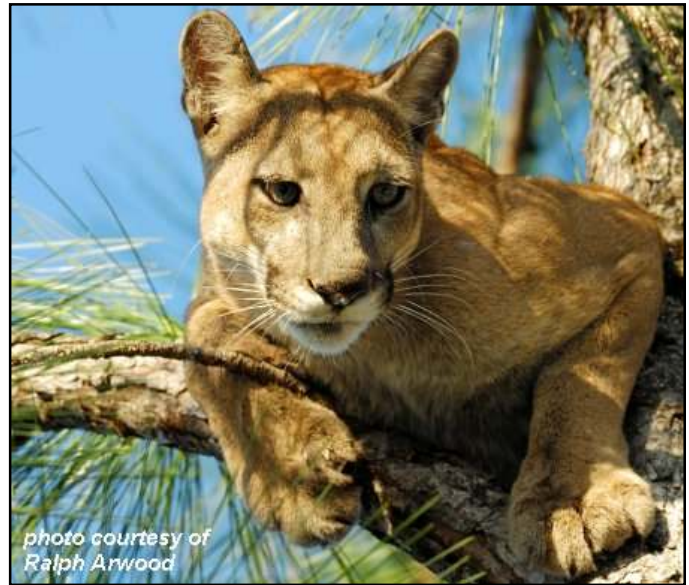
Panthers in Suburbia

by Dennis Giardina

I was going to write about a completely different topic tonight but today I got a call from the Fish and Wildlife Commission capture team leader to see if I could go out with them tomorrow to fill in for one of their guys and that's what I have on my mind right now. I like working with this team whenever I can and this year they have an interesting and different objective. They are tracking and putting GPS/radio collars on panthers living on the eastern edge of Bonita Springs around the C.R.E.W. lands and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. There is a large area of natural and undeveloped lands south of the Caloosahatchee River, around the Ft. Myers Airport, Florida Gulf Coast University and north of Immokalee Rd where panthers and many other large animals roam.

Panthers move into this area, and others like it, to feed on the white-tailed deer and wild hogs that stray out of forests and prairies to feed around Ag fields, rights-of-way, ranches and other private properties on the edge of sprawling Naples and Ft. Myers. Unfortunately, that increases the risk of panthers coming into contact with people. Panthers adapt very well to local conditions and easily-available food sources and they occasionally attack livestock and pets that are not secured behind a fence or in a pen at night. Young panthers can't compete with established adults for prey and territory and sometimes range into marginal, urban edge areas. They are hungry. Injured, old, or sick panthers are in a similar condition and also sometimes find themselves in these areas. They are hungry.

The agencies that manage the recovery of the Florida panther take their responsibilities seriously and are committed to educating people and helping to protect people and their domestic animals from panthers and vice versa. A protocol has been established called the Problem Panther Response Plan for dealing with panther-human issues and conflicts. A lot of



thought, discussion and review went into this plan. It is modeled after similar plans from the Western United States where they have been successfully implemented for resolving problems with cougars and mountain lions.

So, tomorrow we'll be hunting panthers in this area where a new male and female have already been captured and collared in the last six weeks. There is evidence that there may be another female around and it will be good to track these individuals for a while to help us determine their movements and where the edges of their range and ours overlap. One thing I know is that Roy McBride will be getting up at 4:30 tomorrow morning. At first light he'll already be on his swamp buggy with his dogs and they'll set out to look for panther sign, tracks, scrapes, scent trails. He's been doing this a long time. To watch him in action is something I am privileged to be able to do once in while. I have to get up early, too, and 4:30 sure comes fast. Goodnight.

FIELD STUDY OF HAND FERN

by Jack Berninger

The Hand Fern (*Cheiroglassa palmata*) is an endangered species found in the Fakahatchee State Park. Elaine and I have been conducting a population count, Relative Humidity measurements and Poison Ivy presence along a 1000 meter section of a tram off of Jane's Scenic Drive. This past year was the driest we have seen along this tram and very dry for this section of Florida. There were only a few small pools of water along the tram and no flowing water.

The past four years have shown the following population counts of *Cheiroglossa* along this tram. All counts were conducted the first week of January. The first year 2005 had 20 ferns, 2006 had 17 ferns, 2007 had 11 ferns and 2008 had 19 ferns. The 2008 increase was due to the large number (12) of new small ferns.

The right side N.E. walking in on the tram had 10 ferns while the opposite side had 12 ferns.

Relative humidity readings decreased approximately 15% in the section containing the hand ferns. This decrease has been observed over the past three years.

Poison Ivy may also be a limiting factor. The ivy is found on most of the Sable Palms but was not growing on 16 of the trees with the ferns. The other three trees with young hand ferns had only one small ivy plant at the base of the trees.

Another observation was that if Bracken Ferns were growing on the ground there were no hand ferns in the nearby trees.

In conclusion: The adult hand ferns (with stroboli) are declining in number but the increase in young plants was a pleasant surprise. I will be anxious to find out the survival and growth rates of these new plants in the following years.

President's Message

We just completed our January meeting of the Board Directors and several notable things were accomplished. We ratified the changes to the Bylaws which were previously approved and several committees were created. We had a report from Nominating Committee Chair Allen Caldwell which outlined the process for this year's election of new board members. Six current board members have one more year to serve, one is eligible for reelection and we are seeking nominations to fill four Director positions (see page 4).

As you may know from visiting the Park, our major access road, Janes Scenic Drive, has been in very rough shape, with major damage suffered in Hurricane Wilma. We are now happy to report that our master mechanic volunteer, Joe Weber, designed and built a 1200 pound road scraper that has been used several times on Janes Scenic, resulting in a dramatic improvement in the road. The park is indebted to Joe for this invaluable service. Joe's wife, Pat, has also volunteered this winter inputting data collected by Mike Owen, Park Biologist. Together the Weber's have contributed more than forty hours per week and their efforts were recognized by the Board.

The Board also expressed its appreciation for the great support and assistance given by outgoing Park Manager, Dennis Giardina. Dennis has volunteered to remain active in the Fak and has offered to continue working with the Board. While we will miss working with him on a daily basis, we look forward to his expertise and enthusiasm in our Board activities.

Several upcoming opportunities for serving on a volunteer work crew will be announced soon. We would love to have you come and join us.

Our annual members picnic will be held on **Sunday, February 10** at Bill and Pam Mesce's screened pavilion near the Fakahatchee headquarters area. It is a beautiful setting for a picnic, there will be signs pointing to the parking area and the pavilion. The food will be great and there will be live music. It will be a wonderful time to meet and greet other Friend members. We look forward to seeing you.

Nelson Tilden

VOLUNTEERS FOR JANES DRIVE CLEAN-UP

We will be having a work day on Tuesday, February 12. We plan to meet at the park office maintenance building at 9:00AM. We will plan to work about three to four hours. Bring work gloves and wear long pants and long sleeves. For info and to volunteer, phone Nelson at (239) 695-2346.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson and Caryl Tilden

We reported earlier that the winter tourist season got off to a slow start, not only at the Boardwalk, but as reported by area businesses. January has seen a dramatic turnaround and it now appears that attendance figures for the month will top 9000.

Of most interest to many visitors is the nesting of our **bald eagle** pair. They have been seen daily and are now most likely tending to one or more chicks. One adult eagle head is visible on the nest most of the time, and we often see the eagle pair trading places on the nest.

With the constant winter "dry-down" there are more exposed banks at our gator pond for the **alligators** to bask on, and visitors are getting a good look at our two adult alligators and up to 20 juveniles. There has been another **black bear** sighting, and many reports of **white-tailed deer**.

In the canal beside the trail leading to the boardwalk, we have several "regulars", an alligator about seven feet long and a number of **red-bellied turtles**. This is the area where otters have been seen in prior years, but not so far this winter. **Barred owls** are heard almost on a daily basis and a pair of **great horned owls** was recently seen not far from the beginning of the boardwalk.

Some of the **bald cypress trees** are already beginning to regain their needles and soon we will no longer get the question "Why are all these big trees dead?" Winter and Spring are beautiful times in the Fak. Come and enjoy it!

We received the following email from Jack Berninger:

Elaine and I conducted a tour of gate 12 on Friday 1/25/08 and Peter & Jan (Tomlinson) joined us. We left around 3:00pm. Following is their sighting:

On Friday we left the parking area about 20 minutes after you and on the way back, we saw these 3 animals on the road. Panthers, a mother and 2 kittens. We stopped and watched with binoculars and unfortunately a vehicle was coming from the opposite direction, did not see them and scared them off. Jan and I went to the spot where they entered the woods, waited for 10-12 minutes and decided that's it. We began driving, no more than 300 feet in the ditch was a kitten, crouched and facing us. The kitten takes off, we decide to stay for a while and within 5 minutes Jan sees the mother who is now behind us. We were able to observe her for at least 1 minute. Beautiful sight, one I hope we can repeat.

MEMBERSHIP

We have a total of 280 members including 12 in arrears. You can renew or join at the Picnic on February 10.

Welcome to new members:

Dr Jack Benhart, Naples
 Dennis J. Giardina, Naples
 Doug Macomber, Orleans, MA
 Susan O'Farrell, Naples
 H.C. & Jane Rackley, Everglades City
 David Shindle, Naples
 Brenda L. Thomas, Lehigh Acres
 Wendell Vaught, Naples
 Caloosahatchee Bromeliad Society, Ft Myers

NOMINATIONS for candidates to run in the annual election to fill vacant positions on the Board of Directors can be submitted before March 15, 2008, to:

Allen Caldwell, Chair FOF Nominating Committee
 2600 Cardena Street, Ph 3
 Coral Gables, FL, 33134
 email: llewdlacnella@msn.com

Nominees must be members of FOF and over 18 years old. They should agree in advance to serve on the Board and be prepared to fill in an application with biographical data.

The 4th Annual Marjory Stoneman Douglas Festival during the week **February 26 to March 1** is sponsored by the Museum of the Everglades and Collier County Public Library. The program includes:



Fern Walk in the Fak with Jack & Elaine Berninger
Talk about MSD by Capt. Franklin Adams
Hidden Beauty, talk by photographer Rick Cruz
Talk about orchids by Mike Owen
Fak Swamp Walk with Mike Owen
Swamp Country Fair: Music, Art & Crafts sale, fish fry, Otter John & His Wild Animal Show
 For info and reservations, phone (239) 695-0008.

Florida Panther Week is March 8-15 with a myriad of events for all ages. If you would like to help, phone Takako at (239) 353-8442. For info, see www.floridapanther.org.

For information about walks held by the *Alligator Amblers*, the Southern Florida chapter of Florida Trails, see website www.ambler.floridatrail.org.

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.

(c) 2007, Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter, including pictures, may be reproduced without permission.

OFFICERS:	President – Nelson Tilden	Vice-President – Tom Maish			
	Treasurer – Vicky Nagle	Secretary (pro-tem) – Marya Repko			
BOARD:	Signe Backus	Allen Caldwell	Elsa Caldwell	Rick Cruz	Frank Denninger
	John Elting	Cathy Hatch	Tom Maish	Bill Mesce	Karen Relish
	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) ___ extra (\$ _____)
 ___ Youth (\$10) birth date: month ___ day ___ year ___ (members under 18 years old must select this)

NAME _____	EMAIL _____
STREET / P.O.BOX: _____	<u>ALTERNATE ADDRESS</u> _____
CITY _____	CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____	STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____	PHONE _____

MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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