



# The Ghost Writer

JANUARY 2008

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

2008: Jan 19, Feb 16, Mar 15, Apr 5  
price \$45 (\$40 members, \$15 kids)  
**RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!**  
phone (239) 695-2860  
or email: [islandgirlm@msn.com](mailto:islandgirlm@msn.com)

### BOARD MEETING

Sunday, January 27, 10:30 a.m.  
Pavilion at Big Cypress HQ, Ochopee  
for info, phone 239-695-2346

### ANNUAL PICNIC

Sunday, February 10, 11:00 a.m.  
Mesce Pavilion, Copeland  
see more in next column

### Amazing Adventures

Tim Andrus – Biking in Australia  
Friday, January 4, 6:00 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 in Miami  
see [www.19woc.com](http://www.19woc.com)

### Amazing Adventures

Chavez & Arwood – Galapagos  
Friday, February 1, 6:00 p.m.  
see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)

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

On 11/18/07, Dennis Giardina, Marty Main and Wendell Vaught saw 1 **Mangrove water snake** while canoeing in the East River. On 12/7/2007 Bob Newbould, Park Service Specialist, observed 1 male **Snail kite** North of US41 over marsh approximately 1 mile West of SR29. On 12/9/07 at 2PM he noted 1 **manatee** north-bound in the Faka-Union Canal. On 12/8/07, Dennis Giardina, while driving, saw 2 female **Snail kites** between the East River and Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk off of US 41. He also saw one male **Snail kite** on 12/11/07 around 5:15PM south of US 41 between SR 29 and Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. On 12/12/07, Caryl and Nelson Tilden saw 1 **Merlin** picking up a prey item from the ground of the open lawn North of the Park headquarters.

On 12/12/07 Jim Fisher's observations included a **Red-shouldered hawk** which had grabbed an **apple snail** 1.7 miles North of Gate 1 on Janes Scenic Drive (JSD) as well as a **Yellow-bellied sapsucker** 1.8 miles North of Gate 1 on JSD on the east side. He also observed 2 **Turkeys** both male and female at 4:20 PM on JSD 2.0 miles North of Gate 1. They walked then flew up 1 to the East and 1 to the West to trees. On 12/17/07 at 12:20PM, he saw a 3 foot long **Red rat or Corn snake** 1.7 miles North of Gate 1 on the west side.

12/20/07 was the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Fakahatchee Christmas Bird count. Outside the official count zone, Jim Fisher and Mike Owen saw 1 **Short-tailed hawk**, white morph, fly over Janes Scenic Drive to the Northeast near Gate 8 at 5:45PM.

On 12/21/07, Mike Owen, along with out two University of Buffalo interns Chris Grindle and Katherine Szupillo observed one **Red-tailed hawk** flying to the WSW across the NE finger of Dan House Prairie. On 12/22/07, Katherine Szupillo and Chris Grindle spotted 5 juvenile **Land lubbers** 1/2" to 2/3" long on Ambrosia. This is the earliest record of juvenile Lubber grasshoppers at Fakahatchee.

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

The **Annual FOF Picnic** will be held on **Sunday, February 10**. It is earlier this year so that more members can attend and enjoy the wonderful weather we have in February. The location has also changed to the screened pavilion on Bill & Pam Mesce's property in Copeland which is within walking distance of the Preserve office where we can park our cars.

Besides delicious food, there will be live music and a raffle. You are welcome to bring potential new members who will be encouraged join FOF at the event.

You must **RSVP** so we know how many people to prepare for. Phone Marya at (239) 695-2905 or email [FOF\\_90@hotmail.com](mailto:FOF_90@hotmail.com) before February 1.



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

## Change is Inevitable – Except from a Vending Machine

by Dennis Giardina

In early September I got a call from Greg Jubinsky, a Program Director with the Division of State Lands Bureau of Invasive Plant Management about a new biologist position that was being created for South Florida. He said that this biologist would function as DEP's Exotic Species Control Coordinator for the region, helping public land managers from Lake Okeechobee to Key West deal with invasive plant and animal issues. He asked if there was any office space at Fakahatchee for this biologist and after he gave me more details, I joked that the job sounded so good I wanted it! He told me to consider applying for it but I really didn't give it much thought. He contacted the District 4 Bureau Chief and arranged for the position to be stationed at Fakahatchee and then, I didn't hear about it again until a month ago.

Greg Jubinsky and I have collaborated on exotic plant control projects for years. His office has awarded me almost a million dollars in grant money for contracts on both Florida Panther and Fakahatchee since 2001. One interesting thing is in May of 2006, Greg was supposed to give a presentation on exotic animals at my first state-wide Park Managers and Biologists Meeting but he came down with laryngitis and had to cancel the night before. A few months earlier I gave a similar presentation at the FLEPPC Symposium and one of the few people I knew in the Park Service at that time was Donna Watkins, the organizer of the meeting. She had seen my symposium presentation and in a state of panic asked me if by chance I had it with me. I did. There were a few jokes in my script (one including the "s" word) and a couple of gag slides and I was a bit concerned that this audience wouldn't get it. It was a bit intimidating, getting up in front of 300 people, including the Director and all the big wigs in the Park Service but I went for it. I guess they got it because a few times I had to wait for them to stop laughing before I could go on to the next slide and about half way through I thought, "Wow, I'm killing!" Many people came up to me over the following two days, saying they really enjoyed my talk and although I arrived knowing hardly anyone in the Park Service, thanks to Greg's no-show, I left with everyone knowing me.

On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, Greg called me again and said that he and his colleagues thought that I was the person they wanted to fill the Exotic Species Coordinator position and they wouldn't even advertise it if I said I would take it. I asked him for a day or two to think about it and I

decided, as much as I liked being the manager of Fakahatchee, this job was just too appealing and suited to me to pass up. I told him the next day that they were going to have to agree to a couple of conditions, most importantly allowing me to continue working with the Panther Capture Teams. They agreed.

So, dear Friends of Fakahatchee, Thursday December 27, 2007 will be my last day as Park Manager of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve. I have enjoyed working with and serving you over the last couple of years and it has been a privilege for me to steer the ship for a while. If all goes well, the new Park Manager should start in early February and I will help out during the transition and with the hiring process. I have also offered to continue to work with the Board of Directors of the Friends of Fakahatchee and I will serve in whatever capacity they desire. I thank you all for your continued support of the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and wish you all the best in the New Year and beyond.



This photo of Dennis securing a sedated panther in a tree was taken last year by a member of the capture team.

Editor's Note: Dennis is a superb communicator. He always submitted interesting articles and cooperated (however busy he was) in meeting publication deadlines. My thanks to him. I hope we will continue to hear about his work and adventures on these pages. *Marya Repko*

Thanks to our colleagues at Collier Seminole State Park who have sent us their latest newsletter. Go to their website [www.floridastateparks.org/collier-seminole](http://www.floridastateparks.org/collier-seminole) and click on CSO Newsletter.

## President's Message

At its last meeting the FOF board was saddened to hear that Park Manager Dennis Giardina has resigned to accept another post with the State. Dennis has been an exceptional leader for the Park and one who is always ready to cooperate with FOF projects. Dennis indicates that he will join the FOF and help in any way he can in the future. We look forward to continue to benefit from his knowledge, expertise, and enthusiasm. We will miss him as Manager, but we are happy that he has received this new opportunity.

As we have reported earlier, our major park road, Janes Scenic Drive, has been very rough this year. Ranger Bob Newbould filled some of the deeper potholes earlier this month. Now I am happy to report that, due to the efforts of volunteer Joe Weber, a new road scraper has been designed and built, with the assistance of Ranger Bob. Joe is a master mechanic who volunteers two months each winter at the Fak. He conceived of a heavy scraper that could be pulled behind the tractor and would gradually fill in the potholes and level the road. Joe found the steel I-beams in a salvage yard and he, Bob, and I went to pick them up. Joe cut them into shape and welded them – all within a one-week period. The maiden voyage of the scraper occurred a couple of days before Christmas when Ranger Bob pulled the scraper behind the tractor around the park headquarter roads. The 1200-lb. scraper performed perfectly and the day after Christmas it was used on Janes Scenic Drive for the first time. While it will not be an overnight cure, people who have driven the road say they already see an improvement. The rangers or volunteers will be using the scraper regularly and it holds real promise for the future.

Please mark your calendar for Sunday, March 30. That will be our annual Friends dinner and all members are invited. Dennis Giardina will present a very special program entitled "A Year in the Life of the Fak." More details will be forthcoming.

Happy New Year to all of you!

*Nelson Tilden*



Thanks to Steve Paddon, a visitor from New England, who took this photo of a snake eating a frog at the Boardwalk in early December, 2007.

## BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson and Caryl Tilden

Attendance is steadily growing at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. As we arrived at the boardwalk around noon on Christmas Day, there were 23 cars in the parking lot. We have had almost 3000 visitors in the first three weeks of December. Over 200 of that number visited the boardwalk during a two-day period. They were part of an international firm called Tetra-Pak, which brought 700 of its top executives to our area for an Everglades experience. Mike Owen, Karen Relish (new FOF board member), Caryl Tilden, and I led tours designed to give them an overview of the boardwalk and the Fakahatchee as a whole. We were assisted on the first day by Jim Fisher, a wildlife rehabilitation specialist with Broward County, and Kevin Allshouse, a guide with the Ivey House.

Both adult **eagles** are seen on a daily basis now and it is likely that eggs have been laid. One of the eagles is often seen sitting on the nest. Luckily they are sitting higher than in previous years and an adult eagle's head is often clearly visible. Based on prior years, the chicks should be born during the second or third week of January.

The **water level** in the alligator hole continues to drop slowly. The numbers of **wading birds** are down from prior years, as are the numbers of immature **alligators**. The only animals showing an increase this season are the **Florida red-bellied turtles**. As many as 7 of them have been seen at one time along the canal leading to the boardwalk. Even with the drought conditions, the boardwalk continues to remain very beautiful and intriguing to visitors.

*Come and enjoy the great weather and see this slice of the Fakahatchee.*



Thanks to Allen Caldwell for this photo of the Boardwalk Work Party in early November and thanks again to all the many volunteers, not pictured here, for their help.

## MEMBERSHIP

We have a total of 268 members including 19 in arrears to whom final reminders are being sent with this newsletter.

A new YOUTH membership has been introduced. The amended by-laws require that voting members be at least 18 years old. The YOUTH category offers youngsters under 18 the opportunity to be members for only \$10 per year. When the YOUTH member turns 18, he or she is expected to upgrade to Individual membership.

### Welcome to new members:

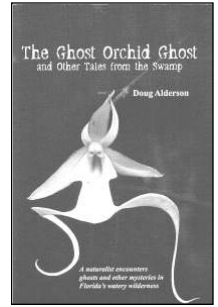
Carla & Kent Garbin, St Petersburg  
 David & Barbara Howard, Gulfport  
 Marsha A. Ketchen, Knoxville, TN  
 John C. Ketchen, Knoxville, TN  
 Jim & Cathy Leonard, St Petersburg  
 Jim & Barbara Meyer, St Petersburg  
 Harry & Carol Pilarski, Naples  
 Kim Pilarski-Brand & Doug Brand, Knoxville, TN

**THANKS to Big Cypress National Preserve for letting us use their meeting room for our Board meeting.**

**The agenda for the Board Meeting on January 27 includes a vote on revised by-law amendments, the formation of standing committees, a report on boardwalk signage, and plans for the February picnic and March dinner.**

## Book Review

by Marya Repko



Doug Alderson has collected his yarns about ghostly encounters in a paperback published recently by Pineapple Press. The title *“The Ghost Orchid Ghost and Other Tales from the Swamp”* reflects the local nature of these supernatural events.

For example, in the title story he writes “I gazed into the orchid’s center at what appeared to be a face ... a dancing fairy or a queen on the throne, the queen of Fakahatchee ... suspended in air, like an apparition.” Of the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker, which stretches to a wingspan of 30 inches and favors cypress swamps, he writes “To spot an ivory-bill is like finding Elvis and all four Beatles jamming together in your living room.”

The author has been telling these tales to groups of all ages so it’s an appropriate family read at “dark-thirty” time when weird things happen. However, he’s a practical man with cautionary tips about survival in the swamp.

At the end of each piece there are a few paragraphs of historical and environmental background to put the subject and location into context. And, if your appetite isn’t sated, there’s a good list of further reading about haunting folklore.

### 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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OFFICERS:	President – Nelson Tilden	Vice-President – Tom Maish			
	Treasurer – Vicky Nagle	Secretary – 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