



# The Ghost Writer

MARCH 2006

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

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

March 11, 18, 21, 25

April 4, 8, 15, 22, May 2, 13

reservations required!

phone (239) 695-4593

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

for schedule and reservations

phone (239) 695-4593

*"Paraguay Jaguar Conservation"*

by Rocky McBride

Tuesday, March 7 at 7:00pm

see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)

*Open House at the Panther Refuge*

Saturday, March 18

see [www.floridapanther.org](http://www.floridapanther.org)

or phone (239) 353-8442 ext. 227

*Volunteer Appreciation Weekend*

*Florida Park Service*

March 24-26

*Paynes Prairie Preserve*

see [www.prairiefriends.org](http://www.prairiefriends.org)

*"Killing Mr. Watson"*

A Play in Two Acts

Saturday, March 25 at 2:00pm

*Smallwood Store, Chokoloskee*

### ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC

Saturday, April 1, at 11:00a.m.

reservations required!

phone (239) 695-2905

or email [FOF\\_90@hotmail.com](mailto:FOF_90@hotmail.com)

## M•O Zone

### SEEN AROUND THE STRAND

Mike reported seeing a **short-tailed hawk** (white morph) on Feb 23 near the office. He also saw a dark morph circling high about the northwest burn zone on Feb 15. Other avian sightings were: an **American bittern** on a log on the south ditch 10 miles up Janes Drive on Feb 14 and another American Bittern on Janes Drive on Jan 9 (a burn day), a **wild turkey** and a **Coopers hawk** on the Prairie Canal on Feb 14, four **loggerhead shrike** seen by Ranger Dave & Bill Pequin on Old Pump Road on Feb 9 and another shrike seen by Manager Dennis Giardina at Pennington Post on Feb 8, a **purple gallinule** seen by Dennis on the north ditch on Jones Grade during the clean-up on Feb 3, three female **hooded mergansers** seen by Rangers Steve and Jill near Gate 3 on Jan 18, a **great crested flycatcher** on Feb 7, and **sandhill cranes** near Gate 19 on Feb 1 after a recent burn.

Office assistant Neicy saw two buck **deer** on Feb 23; one was in velvet and the other had spike antlers. The first **lubber grasshoppers** were seen on Feb 15; there were about 30 very small, dark youngsters. During the cool spell in mid-Feb, a **Mexican free-tail bat** was sleeping on Ranger Jill's porch screen for several days when no insects were flying around. Mike saw a **marsh rabbit** eating grass near the Park office on Feb 9, a **green water snake** (about 13-inches long) on Janes Drive a mile north of Gate 1 on Jan 14, and a young **black bear** that he estimated to weigh 150lb on the Prairie Canal on Jan 20. Ranger Steve saw a **bobcat** near Gate 12 on Jan 15 and he & Jill saw three **deer** near Gate 17 on Jan 18.

On Jan 27 about one mile north of Gate 1 Mike saw a number of wading birds at the side of the drive looking at a 20-inch long **amphiuma** (a salamander sometimes called the "congo eel") which he assumes was killed by one of the birds. Although not in the Preserve, Mike was thrilled to see two **American crocodiles** at Marco airport after Bill Pequin flew him and Dennis over the Fakahatchee on Jan 24.

The "lost orchid" *Cranichis muscosa*, which Karen Relish rediscovered with Mike in January 2004 after it had not been seen for over 100 years, is alive and well. Mike visited the site on Feb 18 and reports that, although not in bloom, several of the plants had signs of earlier flowers.

To volunteer for wildlife observation or to report sightings,  
phone Fakahatchee's resident biologist **Mike Owen** on (239) 695-2886

**THANKS** to Everglades Island Properties and Snook Publications for reproducing this newsletter.

## Notes from the Park

At the Board meeting on February 18, Manager Dennis Giardina reported on his opinion about the Scenic Highway designation of US 41. He decided after examining the matter thoroughly that retaining the designation would definitely be of benefit to the Preserve in large part because it would make a lot of grant money available for the construction of a new entrance and parking area at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk where Old US 41 intersects the Tamiami Trail east of the current boardwalk entrance. Also included in the plan designed by an engineering firm contracted by Florida DEP is an extension of the boardwalk, an elevated observation platform and restoration of the surrounding area. A meeting for groups and individuals who support the scenic highway designation will be held at Rookery Bay on March 16 at 6:00 p.m.

On a related matter, Dennis has written to the Department of Transportation, asking for warning signs and to remove the passing zone in front of Big Cypress Bend entrance. He received an official response from DOT promising to install pedestrian crossing warning signs but refusing to change the passing status. The Board expressed concern that it would take a major automobile accident before the Department took any action. Dennis agreed and will follow up and continue to push for the passing change.

The manager had good news for the Friends. A camp house off Jones Grade is still structurally sound and is available for our use if we want to clean it up.

Finally, he showed photos of panther #79 "Don Juan" who was captured in Copeland and removed from the wild on February 16 after preying on domestic animals several times. Dennis felt that panther #79 was given an appropriate number chances and that his removal was justified. It is still unknown what caused this panther's aberrant behavior.



Visitor Rusty Hughes took this picture of the beautiful Scarlet Snake at the Boardwalk on February 5.

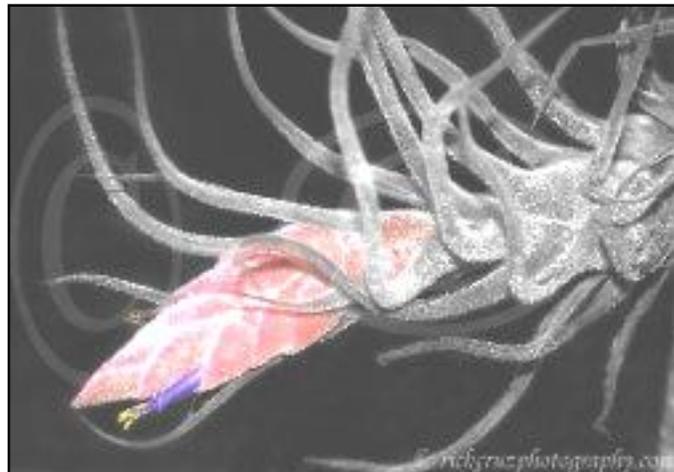


Photo Courtesy of Rick Cruz

## ***Tillandsia Pruinosa***

**by Jack Berninger**

On Wednesday, February 15, my wife Elaine, Ken Lange, and I conducted a population count of *Tillandsia pruinosa*, the "Fuzzy-Wuzzy" airplant, along Jones Grade.

The plants are found along a short section, about 1000 meters along the tram, with all but one on the southeast side. We found 18 plants, half of which were placed on trees by those clearing or walking the tram after the hurricane. Only nine were anchored on the tree surface as an original site. It will be interesting to see how many of the placed plants survive.

Sweet Bay Magnolia seemed to be the preferred tree for those permanently anchored before the hurricane. None were flowering at this time but there were old dried flowers on four plants. This section of the tram represents a small ecosystem of *pruinosa* that I hope can survive.

## **How would you change the Fakahatchee?**

Attached to this newsletter is an official form (CSO Project Priorities) that we can use to tell the Park hierarchy what improvements we'd like to see at the Fakahatchee. The manager has deliberately not told us his priorities so that we can come up with our own ideas. Please return the form to our email or postal address before March 15.

## **Free Site for Volunteers**

The Park is looking for a couple to help in the office and visitor center next winter. In exchange, these special volunteers can park their trailer or RV near the Park office and hook into the utilities. If you are interested, please contact Dennis at (239) 695-4593.



Photos Courtesy of Rick Cruz

**The Burn Crew.** All participants must have special training. However, burn preparation can be done by anyone and entails tidying up around the area a few days before the fires are set.



Photo Courtesy of Barry Metcalfe

## BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson Tilden

The peak of the tourist season has come to the Boardwalk. In the first three weeks of February we had 6,947 visitors, with many from foreign countries. We also had two groups of Elderhostel members who participated in guided interpretive talks by Caryl and myself. FOF board member Bud Scott and his wife Marg have joined Signe Backus and Jerry Winters as Boardwalk greeters and are adding a great welcoming touch for visitors.

New wildlife sightings include three adult black-crowned night herons along with a juvenile. A second new red-shouldered hawk's nest has been built along the Boardwalk and one of the nests is constantly attended by adults, leading us to believe that we will have new chicks soon. The bald eagles have been seen nearly every day, either on the nest or nearby. There is activity that makes us think we will see eaglets very soon. One of the most exciting sightings this month was an adult barred owl with two very young juveniles. Visitors have seen the owls on several different occasions, with many saying it is the first owl they have ever seen in the wild. Snake sightings this month include a cottonmouth moccasin, several black water snakes, two yellow rat snakes, and two ribbon snakes. Several turtles have been seen this month including a large alligator snapping turtle, a large soft-shelled turtle and many Florida red-bellied turtles. One 12" red-bellied turtle was seen by a crowd of visitors barely escaping a hungry adult alligator. We have been fortunate to have two or three wood storks as "regulars" at the gator pond most of the winter.

A new sign has been added which invites visitors to donate to the Boardwalk. We have been very gratified by the response.

### EMAIL from the President of FOF

Sent: Friday, February 10, 2006 11:08 AM

I want to thank all volunteers who helped with the burn prep. on Tuesday. Burning is our highest priority this season and Steve is most grateful to those of you who have given up your time and effort on his behalf. As your president, I am happy to report that volunteer participation is up sharply this year. Congratulations to all of you, and keep up the good work !!!

Now that the East River is clear, we will resume canoe trips on Saturdays --- dates to be determined by show of interest. Gary Nederveld and Jean Bub will guide these trips . Please call the preserve at (239) 695-4593 if you have interest in participating or help in guiding.

Please note: VOLUNTEER HOURS should be submitted to the office by the last day of the month. Also, please break out hours directly related to Wilma cleanup as these will be needed to obtain monies/grants in the very near future.(ie,all you good people with Woodard and crew who put in mucho hours on the Jones Grade – and, Dennis, that includes your mother!).

BEST TO YOU ALL,  
John Elting

*NOTE: Volunteer forms are available at the Park Office.*



Member Roberta SilverShaw of "Critter Tales" in Ft Lauderdale sent in this photo taken at the end of December in the Fakahatchee, which she describes as "one of my favorite places to 'shoot' and meditate". She has also placed a matted print for sale in the Park office.

### **MEMBERSHIP**

We have 212 fully-paid members, plus 63 who are still in arrears from the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2005 and the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2006. There are also 11 members from previous quarters who have been dropped.

If your renewal is overdue, you will receive a final notice with this newsletter. Please reply, even if only to say you no longer want to support us!

#### **Welcome to new members:**

- Mr & Mrs Dan London, Virginia Beach, VA
- Linda & Nick Penniman, Naples
- Danielle Smith & Mike Sorrell, Naples

### **ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC**

Our picnic this year will be on Saturday, April 1<sup>st</sup> and will feature a pig roast out in the Strand near Ballard Camp with lots of activities such as buggy rides, swamp walks and live music. Transport will be provided from the parking lot to the picnic site, starting at 11:00a.m. The event is strictly for members and reservations are necessary so that we can plan the food and schedule your ride to the camp. Please phone Marya before March 17 on (239) 695-2905 or email FOF\_90@hotmail.com.

The new website designed and hosted by Explorittech of Naples is live on [www.FriendsOfFakahatchee.org](http://www.FriendsOfFakahatchee.org). We welcome your comments and suggestions via the contact link on the site.

### **Spanish Translator Needed**

We would like to issue our brochures and information leaflets in Spanish to attract more of the local community and visitors from the Miami area. If you are a native Spanish speaker with a good knowledge of English (and an interest in Fakahatchee's unique habitat), please contact Marya at (239) 695-2905.

**THANKS** to Connie Fullmer of Vantastic Tours for her generous donation and letter of support.

**THANKS** to Suzie Griffis for all her work in the past on our website.

**THANKS** to the Rangers and volunteers who made our booth at the Native American & Pioneer Festival at Collier Seminole Park such a success.

### **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 and SR-29. Its neighbor north of I-75 is the Florida Panther Refuge, with whom Friends may share associate membership.

*The Ghost Writer* newsletter is edited by Jenifer Adams-Mitchell, Patty Huff and Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation of approximately 400 copies.

**OFFICERS:**      President – John Elting                      Vice-President – Allen Caldwell  
                         Secretary – Betty Foster                      Treasurer – Patty Huff

**BOARD:**      Jenifer Adams-Mitchell      Signe Backus      Connie Bransilver      Allen Caldwell      Elsa Caldwell  
                         Rick Cruz                      Frank Denninger      John Elting              William Mesce      Allison Nist  
                         Bud Scott                      Nelson Tilden              Jerry Winters              Niki Woodard      Jim Woodard