



The Ghost Writer

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

BOARD MEETING

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

10TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER

Sunday, March 30

Seafood Depot, Everglades City
RSVP to (239) 695-2905

Amazing Adventures

"From Aldabra to the Amazon"
by Marty Main
Friday, March 7, 6:30 p.m.
see p.2 for details
see www.rookerybay.org

FLORIDA PANTHER WEEK

Saturday, March 8 at the Zoo
Saturday, March 15 at the Refuge
see www.floridapanther.org

Amazing Adventures

"Southern Africa"
by Karen Relish & Cyril Marks
Friday, April 4, 6:30 p.m.
see www.rookerybay.org

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 1/27/08, in early evening, Mike Owen observed a **Florida Cotton Mouse** run across Janes Scenic within the first mile of the Drive. On 1/31/08, **1 Red-Tailed Hawk** was observed over the East Prairies and **1 Great Horned Owl** was heard calling over the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk by Mike, Dennis Giardina, and Noel Snyder. On 2/6/08 Kathy Hatch observed a 2.5-foot **Yellow Rat Snake** on Janes Scenic drive about 3.3 miles north of Gate 1. On 2/8/08, Mike Owen and Wendell Vaught saw a 3.5-foot **Yellow Rat Snake** cross East Main.

On 2/13/08, after the rains of about 6.6 inches at Copeland, Mike observed or heard **21 Southern Toads** on the first two miles of Janes Scenic Drive. Mike also heard at least **5 Florida Chorus Frogs** and over **30 Oak Toads** in the same area. On 2/15/08 Mike saw an approx. two-foot-long **Eastern Diamond-Back Rattlesnake** in the East prairies while reading the water levels in the wells. On 2/15/08 around noon Steve Houseknecht and Jill Waisley, both park rangers, saw **3 Turkeys** on SR-29 cross from east to west and back; Steve also saw a turkey west of SR-29. On 2/16/08, a **Red-Shouldered Hawk** dove at a **Barred Owl** just feet above heads of the swamp walkers and then flew off to the south.

On 2/17/08 Mike, Donna Glan-Smyth, John Elting, and Bill Mesce went on a walk after the FOF meeting and enjoyed some of Fakahatchee's beautiful **epiphytes** including orchids highlighted by blooming **Ionopsis**, bromeliads including **nodding catopsis** and many **flowered catopsis** and **Guzmania** as well as **comb ferns** and **tailed strap ferns**. On 2/19/08, Mike and Scott Gonnion, Wildlife Biological Technician, saw a female **Everglades Snail Kite** south of US-41 over the marsh. On 2/19/08, Kathy Hatch saw about **25 Robins** flying over JSD about 9 miles North of G1. On 2/20/08, Don Harmon, Mike, and Karen Relish, OPS park ranger, observed a **Florida Bonneted Bat** flying over Lake Harmon.

On 2/21/08, around 11:45AM Steve Houseknecht and Bob Russell, park volunteer, saw **2 Bobcats** around Lancaster Grade. On 2/24/08, Bob Newbould, park services specialist, saw a 3-foot **Black Racer** in the Fakahatchee Shop compound. He has also been seeing **Marsh Rabbits** off of Jones Grade. On 2/25/08 around 12:22 p.m., Bill Pacquin, park volunteer, and Karen Relish saw the first **Swallow-Tailed Kite** for the season over the West borrow pits off of Janes Scenic Drive. On 2/25/08, Kathy Hatch and Ruth Guidry saw 3 groups of juvenile **Lubbers** along Janes Scenic drive while checking the JSD staff gauges.

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

10TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER

SUNDAY, MARCH 30

Seafood Depot, Everglades City, 6:00 PM, \$20 per person
Food, Wine, Awards, Door Prize
Featured Speaker, Historians, and more ...
RSVP to (239) 695-2905 or FOF_90@hotmail.com



NEW MANAGER!

Renee Rau joins the Fak as Park Manager on April 1 and says "I hope to fulfill my role as a protector of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park by sharing the message of preservation ... giving people the opportunity see the connection between them and the park and empowering them to do their part to preserve this unique and incredible resource."

Renee was born and raised in Daytona Beach where she went to local schools. She was Student Intern in the Marketing Department with the Florida Park Service in 1999 and then served part time with the Bureau of Natural and Cultural Resources before accepting a career service position as the FPS Information Line. She is currently Assistant Manager of Gold Head Branch State Park in Keystone Heights, north of Gainesville.

In her spare time, she is pursuing a B.A. degree from FSU and has studied wetland ecosystems with Dr. Bruce Means of the Coastal Plains Institute. Her hobbies include: "traveling, camping, canoeing and loving life. I'm constantly reading, listening to music and trying to keep up with the arts".

Editor's Note: Thanks to Renee for her quick response to my email for biographical notes. We look forward to meeting her at the 10th Anniversary Dinner on March 30 and working with her after that!



This photo taken on February 17, 2008, by Jim Woodard was sent with the following email: *Don't print location, we have enough problems with poachers. A girl since men have horns. Age unknown, no birth certificate attached, unable to check for driver's license.*

"From Aldabra to the Amazon"

A Preview by Dennis Giardina

Dr. Marty Main is a professor and wildlife ecologist with the University of Florida. He is the creator of the Florida Master Naturalist Program, now in its 7th year, with over 3,500 graduates. He has an indomitable, adventurous spirit and he knows how to tell a story. He will speak on **March 7** at Rookery Bay as part of the "Amazing Adventures" series..

Aldabra Atoll, a World Heritage site, is located in the Indian Ocean, north of Madagascar. It is comprised of four islands which encircle a large lagoon, two thirds of which becomes dry during low tide, and is uninhabited except for a management & research station. It is home to an interesting endemic flora and fauna, including the Aldabra rail, the only surviving flightless bird in the Indian Ocean region, and approximately 150,000 Aldabra giant tortoises. In 1988 Marty went to Aldabra on an exotic species control project and was part of a feral goat removal team. Goats were released on Aldabra by sailors possibly as early as the 16th Century and cause significant damage to the island's flora.

The Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve in Amazonas State is the largest protected flooded forest and the first of its kind in Brazil. The Mamirauá project was created to ensure the conservation of this expansive area, home to Harpy eagles, giant river otters, pink river dolphins, emerald tree boas, and countless other endemic and threatened species while securing a decent standard of living for the local human population. The varzea (or forested floodplain) of the Mamirauá receives up to 50 feet of seasonal flooding over an area of nearly 50,000 square miles. During the dry season, jaguars follow the receding flood waters out of the deep forest and occupy the Reserve in large numbers. Marty's research is focused on the ecology of these Amazonian jaguars.



The pink river dolphin (a freshwater porpoise) is one of the amazing things Marty Main will talk about on March 7.

The Naples Orchid Show "Orchid Oasis" takes place on **March 14, 15, & 16** at the Naples United Church of Christ at the corner of Crayton Road and Seagate Drive (close to Waterside Shops). This is the 35th annual orchid show sponsored by the Naples Orchid Society and this year co-sponsored by Naples Rotary Club. For info, see www.naplesorchidsociety.org or phone (239) 403-7155.

Oasis Visitor Center on US-41 in Ochopee hosts an exhibit of photos and mixed media by Deborah Mitchell, a former Artist-in-Residence at Big Cypress. The Center is open from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily.

President's Message

The Annual Members' Picnic was one of the best ever. Almost a hundred people attended and enjoyed great weather and a wonderful site – Bill and Pam Mesce's screened pavilion located near the Fakahatchee park headquarters. The food and the music were excellent and people lingered well into the afternoon just enjoying the occasion. I want to especially thank Elsie Caldwell who chaired the event again this year. She was assisted by her husband Allen, Caryl Tilden, Bud and Marg Scott, Signe Backus, Jerry Winters, Vicky Nagel, Bill Mesce and of course, Pam Mesce. Pam not only helped in many ways, but conducted a very successful raffle which contained over \$600 worth of donated items. Music was provided in the morning by Matt Chadwick and in the afternoon by the Caloosahatchie Pickers, from LaBelle. All the musicians added greatly to the enjoyment of the occasion.

We are looking forward to our next event, the Friends of the Fakahatchee 10th Anniversary Celebration, which will be held at the Seafood Depot restaurant in Everglades City on Sunday, March 30, beginning at 6:00 PM. The program will be highlighted by a presentation "A Year in the Life of the Fak" by our former park manager, Dennis Giardina. We will also have short presentations by Friends of the Museum president, Carol Moseman, and our own Friends' historian, Franklin Adams.

As you have previously heard from our Nominating Committee chair, Allen Caldwell, we are currently seeking nominations for membership on the board. Anyone interested in nominating a Friends member should contact Allen as soon as possible. The results of the election will be announced on April 13 at the Annual Member's meeting.

Make your reservations and we will look forward to having you with us on March 30.

Nelson Tilden

Are you a former recipient of the Mel Finn Award? As we prepare for the 10th anniversary celebration, we are reaching out to past winners so that we can properly recognize you. Please let us know online to elsacaldwell@msn.com the year that you received the award and your past and recent accomplishments.

The Everglades River of Grass Greenway (ROGG) is an ambitious project initiated by the Naples Pathway Coalition to create a hiking & biking path parallel to the Tamiami Trail (US-41) from Collier Seminole State Park to Krome Avenue. For more info, see their website www.evergladesROGG.org.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson and Caryl Tilden

What an incredible change a couple of days of heavy rain can make! The boardwalk in early February was in the midst of an unusually dry winter period that was most noticeable at the gator hole. The water was not more than 18" deep and all the typical wading birds had disappeared. The adult alligators, on the other hand, had large exposed banks to lie on and visitors got great views and pictures.

Over the course of two days in mid-February Mike Owen, park biologist, recorded over 6.6" of rain in three different areas of the Fakahatchee. The water in the gator hole went from very shallow to as high as we normally see it at the end of the rainy season. There are no banks to be seen! Mike says that the water level in the pond by the park headquarters office went up 27". It was a respite from the drought that made the boardwalk really come alive. It is green and lush and spectacular at this time.

Bald eagle sightings are a daily occurrence and the bringing of food to the nest by both parents can only mean we have a chick or two. Each year the chicks stay deep enough in the nest that we don't see them for the first 6 weeks or so. We should be seeing them soon and, of course, they grow so rapidly that by the end of April they will be nearly ready to leave the nest. The coming few weeks will offer some great eagle viewing.

If you haven't been to the boardwalk lately, make it a point to do it during this special "high water" winter period.

Fuzzy Wuzzy Doing Great

by Jack Berninger

On January 11, 2008, Elaine and I conducted a population count of *Tillandsia pruinosa* (fuzzy wuzzy air plant) along Jones Grade in the Fakahatchee Strand. We found 52 of these plants along an approximate 1000 meter section of this tram beginning at the west side gate, just past the gator hole. Twenty-one of the plants were located on the south side and thirty-one on the north side of the tram. The comparison of populations on the south and north sides over the past three years is interesting.

	SOUTH	NORTH
2006	17	1
2007	32	2
2008	21	31

Hurricane Wilma in 2005 and subsequent vegetation loss in 2006 may have caused greater exposure to sunlight for the north side plants. The increased vegetation growth through 2006 and 2007 may have affected the population on the north side trees. It will be interesting to see what 2009 produce

MEMBERSHIP

We have a total of 286 members including 12 in arrears.
The breakdown by category is:

Individual (112) Family (138) Business (7)
Patron (27) Benefactor (2)

We send the newsletter (in full color!) by email to 247 members, saving over \$100 per issue in postage. If we do not have your address, please send a short note to FOF_90@hotmail.com. All addresses are kept in confidence and only used for official Friends of Fakahatchee business.

Welcome to new members:

Mike & Sara Barry, Naples
Ian Bartoszek, Naples
Dick & Edite Hughes, Naples
Dan & Colleen Lean, Butte, MT
Peter Murray & Mary Swanson, Sanibel

**SEE THE INSERT ABOUT NOMINATIONS TO THE BOARD:
THEY ARE DUE BY MARCH 15!!!**

THANKS to Richard Wahrenberger for letting us hold our board meeting at City Seafood in Everglades City.

Rick Cruz sent us this photo of a panther kill that he watched on February 7 at around 5:30 p.m. He says that at first he couldn't believe he had seen a panther only about .6 mile from Mike Owen's house in Copeland but his picture of a dead marsh rabbit with panther paw prints confirms it. He also reports that on February 11 around 7:00 p.m. he saw a panther cub running down a road in the Everglades National Park, the first of his 11 panther sightings outside the Fak.



Rick's photography, including Fak orchids, is currently being shown at Clyde Butcher's Big Cypress Gallery in Ochopee – a huge honor for Rick.



FOF T-shirts and hats are still available in most sizes and colors by mail order. You can get an order form online at our website www.friendsoffakahatchee.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.

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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: _____

ALTERNATE ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

PHONE _____

MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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