

The Ghost Writer

JANUARY 2013

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee, "Home of the Ghost Orchid"

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturday

Cost: \$70 (\$50 for members)

Reservations Required.

Phone (239) 695-1023

or email FOF_90@hotmail.com

or book online at our website

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2nd Saturday, 3rd Wednesday

Saturday, January 12

Wednesday, January 16

See article on page 3

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, Jan 13, 10 a.m.

Ranger Station, Copeland

For info, phone (239) 370-2654

Lost & Found in Cuba

Mike Owen & Dennis Giardina

Saturday, Jan 12, 5:30 p.m.

Players Club & Spa, Lely Resort

See article on page 4.

MORE EVENTS

Jan 11: Volunteer Open House

Jan 12: Art-in-the-Glades

Jan 12: Orchids in Cuba talk

Feb 16: Ultra Marathon

Mar 14: Elam Stoltzfus talk

Mar 2: Annual Picnic

Apr 14: Annual Dinner

You can download an events calendar for the 2012-2013 winter season by clicking "Events" at our website www.orchidswamp.org.



OPEN HOUSE ...

There will be a Volunteer Open House on **Friday, January 11**, at the Park office from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. with light refreshments and information about new volunteer opportunities. To find out more about this event, email Jeff at Jeffrey.Kneisley@dep.state.fl.us or call him at 239-695-4593.

Lost & Found In Cuba

Hear about the trip that Mike Owen and Dennis Giardina took to Soroa Botanical Garden in Cuba at a photographic presentation on **Saturday, January 12**, at 5:30 p.m. in the Players Club & Spa, Lely Resort, Naples. Reservations are required! The cost is \$25 which includes heavy hors d'oeuvres and drinks. You can book places on our website (click on Events) or phone (239) 695-2905 for info. *See page 4 for an article by Dennis.*



COASTAL CRUISE

The next Coastal Cruise to Fakahatchee Island takes place on **Sunday, January 13**, starting at 3:00 p.m. from the National Park in Everglades City. The chartered boat tour returns about 6:00 p.m. after stopping at the island where a naturalist will guide visitors up the shell mound path to the historic cemetery. Cost is \$75 and reservations are required. See our website or phone Pam at (239) 695-1023.

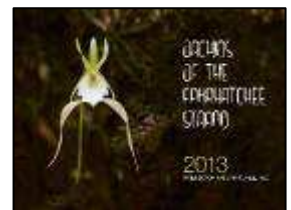
Art in the Preserve

The next En Plein Air sketching and painting session in the Fakahatchee is on **Saturday, January 19**, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Places are limited and reservations are required. There is no charge. Phone Karen at (239) 695-2886 or email lizardart@gmail.com.



ORDER NOW

It's not too late to order our beautiful Orchid Calendar as a thank-you gift or for yourself. Let us send this work of art to your friends and family with a gift card. See our website to order with a credit/debit card or phone Jimene at (239) 293-8742.



M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 11/7/12, Bente Torvund, Administrative Assistant, observed an **American Bittern** fly from south to north over US-41 just before intersection of SR-29 and US-41. On 11/17/12, close to sunset, Scott and Conny Randolph observed 2 **Common Nighthawks** up from the beginning of Janes Scenic Drive (JSD). On 11/25/12, at 12:30PM, Howard Lubel observed an **Everglades Mink** crossing JSD about a mile prior to West Main.

On 12/3/12, at 10:08AM, Mike Owen, Biologist, near Gate 12/East Main observed an adult **American Bald Eagle** fly with a dead mammal to the Northeast. On 12/4/12, between 9:27AM-12:26PM, along the first 2 miles of JSD, Mike Owen observed 4 **Woodstorks**, 6 **Great Egrets**, 2 **Great Blue Herons**, 13 **White Ibis** (8 adults, 5 immature), 1 **Barred Owl**, 2 **American Goldfinches**, 1 **Black and White Warbler**, 1 **Eastern Tufted Titmouse**, and 1 **Blue Gray Gnatcatcher**. On 12/5/12, in the morning, along US-41 in the marsh near the Boardwalk, Renee Rau, Manager, Mike Owen and others observed 5 **American Bitterns** and 1 **King Rail**.

On 12/6/12, Mike Owen observed 1 sub-adult **Black Bear** crossing the very beginning JSD. On 12/8/12, at 10:53AM, Mike Owen observed 1 **American Kestrel** at 0.1 mile North of Gate 1 and again on 12/10/12 at 14:51 in the same area. On 12/8/12, at 4:51PM, Marques Lopez, Jenn Stine, Cyndy Marquez and Bob Becker observed a **Snapping Turtle** on JSD near Gate 1. On 12/14/12, at 7:38AM prior to Gate 12, Tom Trotta and Richard Trotta and Mike Owen observed a **Cooper's Hawk** fly West over JSD and later a **Short-tailed Hawk** (white morph) NW of Gate 18.

On 12/14/12, around noon, along SR-29 between the entrance to JSD and US-41, Donna Day and Ernie Winn, volunteers, observed 14 **Double Crested Cormorants**, 1 **Red-shouldered Hawk**, 2 **Anhingas**, 2 **Great-blue Herons**, 2 **Snowy Egrets**, 1 **White Ibis** and 2 **Great Egrets**. On 12/15/12, early morning, from Alligator Alley to JSD along SR-29, Dino Barone observed multiple wading and water birds including **Great Blue Herons**, **Great Egrets**, **Wood Storks**, **Double-crested Cormorants** and **Anhingas**.

On 12/15/12, mid morning, while walking along Gate 7/West Main, Christopher Ohanian observed **Raccoon**, **Bobcat** and **Florida Panther** tracks in the fresh mud. On 12/15/12, at 1:57PM, Scott Randolph observed a 3-foot **Cottonmouth** fall out of a tree and upon landing went upside down for ~30 seconds (playing dead), then flipped over, coiled up opening its white mouth holding its ground motionless before moving away.

If you want to report sightings, contact Park biologist Mike Owen or his assistant Karen Relish by phone at (239) 695-2886 or by email at FOF_90@hotmail.com



Thanks to Dick Brewer for this photo of robins perching in cypress trees during the Christmas Bird Count.

BIRD COUNT

by Karen Relish

On a 2012 Christmas Bird Count at Fakahatchee along Jones Grade, our group counted 31 different species of birds with 1,227 individuals. Birds that were heard as well as seen were counted.

Over 1,100 of the birds counted were American Robins. The robins observed and heard were flying as well as taking a short time to perch on cypress and feed on the Sabal Palm berries. I felt we had walked into the robin-hood.

Some of the other birds heard or seen were Tree Swallows, Red-bellied, Downy and Pileated Woodpeckers and a Yellow bellied Sapsucker, warblers including Prairie, Palm, Black-and-White and Common Yellowthroat and wading and water birds including Anhinga, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night-heron, White Ibis, and Wood Stork.

We walked and covered as much of our designated route as we could. In addition to birds, we found along our route multiple fresh bear scat containing berries, most likely from Brazilian Pepper, Florida Panther scrapes, and butterflies such as Zebra Longwings and a Julia, a Black Racer, and a dead (unfortunately) but still intact Five-lined Skink -- a chance for me to get an up close view of a skink's underbelly.



VOLUNTEER CORNER

JANUARY WORKDAYS

by Dino Barone

The month of December has been very active. There has been a concerted effort to control (ideally eradicate) Caesar weed, Mexican Petunia, Lygodium, Air Potatoes, Cogon grass, and so many other non-native plants on various tram trails. Brazilian Pepper is still, and most likely always will be, target number one, and unfortunately winter time is when the red berries are prevalent. Now, if we could only teach the bears and birds to not eat and widely disperse the berries ... JSD is like the Palmetto Expressway (for those homesteaders in the Miami area) always in need of some attention, such as road repair, mowing and keeping the Hog Plum in check.

February 16 is the EVERGLADES ULTRA MARATHON (only 6 weeks away) being run out and about the various trails, many of which are still in need of some attention, to provide both runners and volunteers manning the various aid stations easy access. We could sure use some more help with these endeavors. With cooler temperatures, low humidity and barely a mosquito buzzing around in search for its next blood donation, now is a good time to come out and work off some of the extra helpings of merriment we all have enjoyed during the holidays.

Sunday January 6 is a planned work day.

Friday, January 11, Open House (4-7pm), *see page 1*

Saturday January 12 is a scheduled Volunteer Workday

Wednesday January 16 is a scheduled Volunteer Workday

We suggest you wear long pants, long sleeve shirt and bring gloves, something to drink, a snack and eye protection.

Please contact Jeff Kneisley (Jeffrey.Kneisley@dep.state.fl.us 239-695-4593), Ranger Volunteer Coordinator or myself (sunnyg8tr@aol.com) if you are able to participate. This will help us to organize both transportation and tools for the given work day.



Thanks to Francine Stevens for this photo and email:

Late afternoon of 27 December mid-way before the boardwalk begins I had to stop and investigate the birds ruckus that was going on. As it turned out, it was a considerable flock of Robins; they were so active it was a challenge to get at least one decent picture but I managed. It's a real treat for me to see them here at the boardwalk – they sure brought back memories of announcing spring when living up North.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Linda Koreny

This is my second winter season as a volunteer on the Fakahatchee Boardwalk at Big Cypress Bend. I have found it to be an amazing place. I am learning a lot. I walk slowly and as quietly as possible looking and watching. I try to vary the time of the day whenever possible but, no matter, it never fails to be an interesting place to spend some time. And it seems that any time of the day there are visitors.

At 3:30 in the afternoon on December 14, an adult Florida Black Bear and two cubs could easily be seen walking around the far end of the Gator Pond. About 10 visitors and I watched from the observation platform as they continued around to the area which can be seen from the Turtle Sign. One of the cubs climbed a tree and then fell. The adult splashed around in the water a bit. The three of them seemed quite comfortable playing in the area for nearly 20 minutes.

Two Florida Bald Eagles have been reported to be in the Eagles' nest and an Osprey was in the nest which can be viewed by the Pond Apple Sign. Zebra Longwing Butterflies, Great Egrets, Ibis, Black Crowned Night Heron, Black Racer Snakes and Turtles are often report by visitors and volunteers. Red-Shouldered Hawks, Barred Owls, Red-Bellied Woodpeckers have been reported as heard by volunteers. Birders visiting the area have been delighted by what they have seen and heard and are glad to share their knowledge and photos.

Of course, the Alligators are the single most interesting topic of visitors. From the observation platform only one Alligator can be seen now as one died this past May. No babies have appeared this year but we have seen 7 which seem to be one year old, 2 which might to be two years old and, of course, the mother. Oh, the questions! Are they real? Are they used to people? Can I take a photo with my child on its back? Don't the birds know they will eat them?

Ernie and Donna used an encounter with a 3' Yellow Rat Snake as a teachable moment with visitors explaining that it is not venomous and that it is an important part of the ecosystem.

My email address is: lkoreny@gmail.com. I would invite you to please share what you have seen and heard during your visits to the Boardwalk.



This photo of the yellow rat snake at the Boardwalk was taken by Ernie Winn.

LOST & FOUND IN CUBA

by Dennis Giardina

I never thought I would be able to go to Cuba. In the past I've spent hours looking at maps of the Caribbean and I've wondered about the region's largest island, its environs, flora and fauna. Cuba is a biodiversity powerhouse. It's the principal center of evolution and speciation in the Antilles (the major islands of the Caribbean) and one of the most biologically diverse islands in the world with 42 distinct ecosystems and 23 landscape types. There are 6,519 known vascular plants, including around 350 native orchid species and there are 16,516 documented animal species. Of Cuba's 612 vertebrate species, 15 mammals, 91 reptiles, 43 amphibians, 23 fish and 22 birds are endemic. In fact approximately 50% of Cuban plants and 42% of Cuban animals can only be found there. Yes, I dreamed about going to Cuba but there were obstacles, seemingly insurmountable, preventing me from doing so.

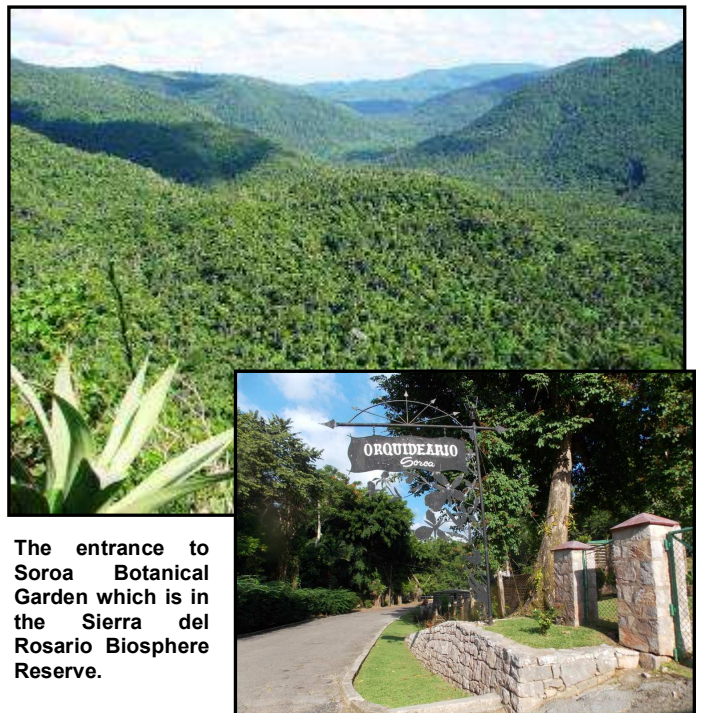
It's difficult to talk about Cuba without geopolitics creeping into the conversation. Everyone seems to have an opinion about the Republic of Cuba and its complicated historical relationship with the United States of America, as I suppose I myself do. I think that most people would agree that regardless of our different customs, governments, religions and societal structures, human beings are more or less the same everywhere – part murderous monkey, part divine angel and every conceivable thing in between – regardless; I am way more inspired by the natural world than by the political one. That is what attracted me to Cuba in the first place and is what I hope will eventually bring me back there.

Fakahatchee Park Biologist Mike Owen and I have been working together with Matt Richards of Atlanta Botanical Garden's Orchid Conservation Center to experimentally restore colonies of the cigar orchid, *Cyrtopodium punctatum* to the Fakahatchee Strand where they were once numerous but are now extremely rare due to over-collecting in the 20th Century. In fact when we began our project in 2007 there were less than 20 known cigar orchids within the entire Preserve. Two other species of epiphytic orchid, *Epidendrum acunae* and *Bulbophyllum pachyrachis*, were wiped out by collectors during that same era. In the U.S. they were only known to occur naturally in the Central Slough of the Fakahatchee Strand and even before the industrial logging period, they were probably rare, found in disjunctive populations composed of few individuals where deep water and the super canopy protected them from frost and desiccation. The nearest wild populations of Fakahatchee's two "lost orchids," *Epidendrum acunae* and *Bulbophyllum pachyrachis* naturally occur in Western Cuba, where coincidentally Mike, Matt and I were invited to attend an international orchid conference to present a paper on our cigar orchid restoration project.

The VIII International Orchid Workshop was held about 50 miles west of Havana at Soroa Botanical Garden which is located within the Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve on the eastern slopes of the Guaniguanico Mountain Range in Pinar

de Rio Province. It spans about 66,000 acres and its highest peaks reach about 2,000 feet above sea level from where one can view both the north and south coasts. Soroa Botanical Garden was built upon a karst hill top where the limestone and vegetation seem to blend one into the other. Rocky stairways wind up, down and around through collections of palms and trees, flowering plants of all sorts and orchids, lots of orchids. Soroa Botanical Garden has the greatest collection of native Cuban orchids in the country. We spent six days in Soroa but Mike and I hardly saw any of the botanical garden or the surrounding mountainside. Most of the time we were there, we were either in the stone building up in the garden where the workshop took place, eating in a restaurant or on a field trip.

There were many interesting, orchid-related presentations given at the Workshop and many of the participants were members of a group called the Orchid Seed Stores for Sustainable Use (OSSSU), a Darwin Initiative project run by Tim Marks and Phil Seaton out of Kew Botanical Garden, designed to establish orchid seed banking around the globe. OSSSU aims to collect and store seeds of a minimum of 250 species, focusing on orchid hot spots in Asia and the Tropical Americas, representing the orchid floras of 16 participating countries. The talks were presented in three languages (English, Portuguese and Spanish) with lots of pauses for translation across the cosmopolitan room. Mike and I gave our presentation in both English and Spanish. At the end of our slide show, I made a proposition to the Cuban botanists in attendance but especially to Dr. Rolando Perez, the organizer of the Workshop and the Director of Science there at Soroa Botanical Garden.



The entrance to Soroa Botanical Garden which is in the Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve.

LOST & FOUND IN CUBA (continued)

by Dennis Giardina



A stairway within the Soroa Botanical Garden laden with orchids



Mike standing on a mountain peak against cloud formation associated with the passage of Hurricane Sandy.

Dennis Giardina is the Everglades Region Biologist for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and was formerly the Park Manager of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve.

Our last slide showed a satellite map of the Caribbean, with arrows pointing to Fakahatchee Strand and Soroa, Cuba, demonstrating how close the two are to one another, both places and their respective land masses separated only by the Straits of Florida. I said that Mike and I would like to attempt an experimental restoration of the two Fakahatchee lost orchids using seed from populations of both species from the Soroa area. I told them that my dream was to locate plants already in cultivation in a private collection or a botanical garden in Cuba that were grown from local, wild seed, enlist someone to pollinate them, collect their seeds and send them to Soroa Botanical Garden. Somehow arrange a way to transfer those seeds from Soroa to our partner Atlanta Botanical Garden so they can grow the *Epidendrum acunae* and *Bulbophyllum pachyrachis* plants that will be ready to out-plant in Fakahatchee about two years later, then celebrate with our Cuban collaborators who will be with us in Fakahatchee when we establish our first experimental restoration plot of one of the lost orchid species.

As I laid down our proposal, I had an eye on Dr. Perez who sat very stoically in the front row. Some of the other Cuban botanists approached me at the break following our presentation and expressed their interest in our project but I didn't get a chance to talk to Dr. Perez. The next day, at the end of the morning session, Dr. Perez asked me to sit down with him to talk more about the details of what I proposed. Dr. Perez and I had been developing a rapport over the previous two days and I was really hoping that he would be receptive to our invitation to collaborate with us, especially after we learned that he and his daughter Yunelis were leading a similar experimental orchid restoration project in the Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve. After we talked a while, he said that he might be able to help us and we shook hands. He told me to come back from lunch a little early and to bring Mike with me.

I ran down to the little restaurant where Mike and the rest of the Workshop attendees were about to be served lunch. I grabbed Mike and I said, "Mike, Dr. Perez seems like he's willing to work with us and he told me to get you and come back early because he wants to show us something." We were both famished but there wasn't time for me to order and eat so we split his lunch and hurried back up to the botanical garden. We found Dr. Perez who grabbed his keys and led us about a hundred fifty feet from the conference room where the Workshop was being held, to a locked shade house. He opened the door and we walked through ...

*Find out what happened next at the talk by Dennis & Mike on **Saturday, January 12**, at 5:30 p.m. in the Players Club & Spa, Lely Resort, Naples. For info and reservations, see www.orchidswamp.org (click on Events) or phone (239) 695-2905.*



CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Nominations are now being sought to fill positions on the FOF Board of Directors. The Board meets every other month during the summer and monthly throughout the remainder of the year (usually on Sunday), sponsors events, raises money, authorizes expenditures, and sets priorities and objectives for both short-term and long-term improvements to benefit the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve. You will get to know and work with park staff and those with an intimate knowledge of what the park has to offer. We actively promote volunteer participation to assist the park staff, regardless of desire for membership on the Board.

A nominee must be a member in good standing at least 18 years of age, verify a willingness to actively participate at board meetings and activities during the two-year term beginning in April, and be prepared to submit a brief statement of background, interests and qualifications. ALL interested members are encouraged to apply. Seasonal residents are welcome. Please do not nominate anyone who has not agreed to serve.

If you are willing to serve, or know a member that is, please send your nomination (including yourself, if interested), with: your name and contact information, and the nominee's name, address, phone, email, and any other contact information, to: friendsoffakahatchee@hotmail.com, or mail to Jim Woodard at 17001 SW 90 Ave., Palmetto Bay, FL 33157, as soon as possible. The deadline for nominations will be announced later. All nominations must be in writing, but questions can be addressed to Jim at the email address listed above or by calling 305.856.4559. If you do not receive an email confirmation of the nomination within two business days, please call the number listed above.

Jim Woodard, Chairman, Nominations Committee
Howard Lubel, Immediate Past President
Marya Repko, Member, Nominations Committee

FIRST ANNUAL CAMPAIGN

by Bruce Bunch

By year-end, 47 Friends of Fakahatchee members contributed \$6,953 in response to a November letter from president Ray Carroll. In the letter, Ray explained "because of state funding cutbacks, the role of our group must be greater than in the past. We have to step up and meet the challenge of providing more funding than ever before for critical personnel, maintenance and operating costs."

The letter gave donors the opportunity to fund specific park needs and donations were received for office supplies, a trail camera kit and two Blue-Ray players. The majority of contributors made general donations ranging from \$15 to a high of \$1000, with most in the \$100 range. Overall, about 13 percent of FOF members contributed to the campaign.

Annual fund raising campaigns are offered by most volunteer organizations to give members a chance to make tax-deductible contributions. With this solid start, the Friends are looking forward to a 2013 campaign that will inspire even more participation and donations.

President's Message

by Ray Carroll

Well, since the world hasn't ended (yet) we must go on. There are still some things to do and worth doing. As soon as this is written I'm heading for Fourstate Prairie in the Fakahatchee. It's been too long.

The response to the annual appeal letter has been pretty good. There were several sizable gifts, but some of the critical needs have not been met and there is still opportunity to help if you have not completed your charitable giving. If you've lost your letter and want to review the needs list, send me an e-mail at ray@carrollandcarroll.com or call me at 239.775.1147.

Recently we received an e-mail from a member unhappy that FOF is working to make up for State budget shortfalls. I wrote back that all of us feel the pinch and we hope one day soon to go back to a more normal State budgeting policy. After all, considering how much the citizens of Florida have already invested in preserving land, it only makes sense to adequately fund land management. However, even when that good day comes, it is still the mission of FOF to support the mission and objectives of Park management and staff. And we have some very good staff worthy of support. So, view these tough times without too much distress. We are only doing what we're supposed to, and maybe for the moment doing so with more urgency. That's where your support comes in.

If you're paying attention you know that the process of nominations to fill Board vacancies is under way. We need board members with talents in finance/accounting, information technology, development (fund raising) and public relations (connections). Our challenge for the coming year(s) is to build the membership and volunteer corps. Did you know there is a very active volunteer corps including many who are not even FOF members? Lots of us find pleasure and satisfaction working in the field, hand-in-hand with staff thus seeing the immediate results of our labors.

If you have wanted to be involved; to know that what you were doing was making a difference. If you feel the urge to get outdoors to see the real Florida, but don't want to be another tourist, we have what you're looking for. Just volunteer and meet other people that feel like you do. When have I steered you wrong?

Well, time for me to go. It will be mostly dark by the time I get to camp, but the fire will be burning and there will be family to meet me. Happy New Year!

See you in the swamp.

Ray

CORRECTION

In our December issue, we gave credit for a Volunteer Report to Cyndy Marquez when, in fact, it was Dino Barone who was the author. Apologies to both for the confusion.

How & Why?

We asked members how they heard about the Fak, why they joined FOF, and what they appreciate about our group.

I had spent a large part of my adult life in Africa, travelling to many remote areas. I grew to love the flora and fauna of Africa, and interaction with some of its most dangerous animals as well as people. So when I moved to the U.S. and later Naples, Florida, although nothing can be really be called 'remote', I was able to recapture some of feel of the natural environment by hiking and biking in the Big Cypress and surrounding areas. Qualifying as a 'Florida Master Naturalist' increased my awareness of the fragile nature of what remains available for enjoyment of future generations. I discovered the Fakahatchee by chance while travelling through the Picayune State Forest, and realized that nothing else like it existed in the U.S. Many hiking and visits to all parts of it have reinforced that experience. It is incorrectly referred to as the 'Amazon of the United States, as it is mostly swamp whereas the Amazon is mostly dry and bisected with rivers; but it still has that quiet atmosphere and solitude so rare in today's hustle and bustle, as well as adventure if one wades into the swamps to seek the Ghost and other rare orchids.

Tony Marx

My wife and I bought our first time-share on Marco Island in the fall of 2004, but it wasn't until 2008 that we knew of Fakahatchee. A friend of ours up north saw an article on the FOF swamp walks in the New York Times travel section, and thought that it might be close to Marco Island. It looked like a great experience, so I took the walk in the fall of 2009, and have been hooked since - getting memberships, more swamp walks, the regular fall and spring FOF dinners, the coastal boat cruise, innumerable board walks, etc. Now, if I can only get wife Cyndy to believe that there is nothing in that 3 feet of black water that can hurt her ...

Tom Jones

After retiring from the northeast 9 years ago, we moved full time to Port of the Islands. I explored the Ten Thousand Islands area by boat and kayak, and hiked and biked the interior areas. While doing this, I developed a keen interest in the history of the area and read extensively; this really brought life to the things I saw and experienced. A couple of years ago, a friend and neighbor (FOF Member) invited me to several FOF functions which I found very interesting. I then was invited, by this same friend who won a camping trip at an auction, to spend several nights camping on Four Stake Prairie at the Carroll family "Gator Hole" campsite; I was hooked! When Ray Carroll was made President of the OFF, he solicited for new members and I joined. I wanted to support the fine ongoing efforts by FOF and learn and enjoy in the process. Who knows, maybe I can actually contribute to this wonderful effort!

Dan Kelly



ENCOUNTER A Lesson in the Swamp

by Rose Flynn

Walking into the swamp is always a challenge for the senses. You must stay alert and aware of your surroundings both for self protection and viewing pleasure. Every venture is educational, exciting and humbling.

On this cool December morning the canopy of the swamp presents *Encyclia cochleata* in bloom at every turn. Dainty flowers dressed in purple and white with yellow curvy legs on tippy toes are dancing in the air off pond apple and pop ash trees. Tree trunks emerge from reflections in the water which is speckled with fallen red and yellow pond apple leaves. The beauty keeps me reaching for my camera. At the same time, each step requires care that you not step on a basking cotton mouth at the edge of a pool nor on a gator resting on the bottom. This is their home. When I hear Ibis flush from a nearby pond I wonder, do they fear me or is there something else nearby I can not see? Poison Ivy is inevitable!

While my companions and I share enthusiasm for our swamp walk other commitments call us back onto the tram. I am a little ahead of the group and see another irresistible open slough. I step down into the clear cool water again. To the north a space opens up surrounded by cypress. The water rises to my knees as I go further with desire to explore that space too. Passing a cypress stump I look into the water one short step to my right and glimpse a large oval patch of brown squares resting on the water's surface. Recognizing the reptilian pattern and color I photographed two weeks earlier basking on the tram, my heart skips a beat as I try to keep it out of my throat. I run for the tram cautioning my companions, who have begun to follow "Get out!"

Venturing into the swamp teaches me humility. Thoughts of what could have happened remained with me all day, popping in and out of my head, sending adrenaline through my veins. One can never be too cautious in the swamp. Even now, weeks later, the encounter remains a constant reminder of how vulnerable we all are – me, you, the orchids, the alligator, the swamp, the Fakahatchee.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 357 memberships including 13 who haven't renewed for the 4th quarter of 2012 and were sent reminders by post and email.

Renewal letters for the 1st quarter of 2013 are being sent in early January. We look forward to your prompt replies.

Welcome to new members since our last newsletter:

jack & Desire Foard, Naples
Jackie Fresenius, Naples
Donna Glann-Smyth, Everglades City
Patrick Higgins, Naples
Jennifer Stine, South Miami
Linda Walfield, Everglades City
Ben & Diana Walton, West Palm Beach
Cindy Walton, Jupiter
Deborah Woods, Naples

Technology Committee

We are rethinking our website and the data base software for membership, events, and donations. If you have experience and would like to advise, please contact us at FOF_90@hotmail.com.



New member Linda Walfield sent this photo of a panther family on a September morning out on Janes Scenic Drive.

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.**, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation Citizen Support Organization, provides financial and volunteer support to preserve the unique ecology and cultural heritage of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and to educate the public about its importance. The Fakahatchee is the largest cypress strand 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 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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PRESERVERS OF THE FAKAHATCHEE: Bruce & Janet Bunch
BUSINESS PATRONS: EarthTech Environmental, Naples Bicycle Tours, North American Canoe Tours, Shamrock Bank, Shurr Adventures

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NEW 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) ☐ Patron (\$100) ☐ Benefactor (\$500)
☐ Lifetime Individual (\$1,000) ☐ Lifetime Family (\$1,500) ☐ Protector (\$2,500) ☐ Preserver (\$5,000)
☐ Business Patron (\$200) ☐ Business Benefactor (\$500) ☐ Extra Donation (\$ _____)
☐ Youth (\$10) under 18 (birth date: month ____ day ____ year ____)

NAME _____
STREET / P.O.BOX: _____

EMAIL _____
ALTERNATE ADDRESS _____

CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____

CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____

MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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