

The Ghost Writer

APRIL 2012

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st and 2nd Saturday ending April 14

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

Reservations Required.

Phone (239) 695-1023

or email islandgirlm@msn.com

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

Saturday, April 14
Tuesday, April 17
See article on page 6

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, April 15, 1:00 p.m.

Ranger Station, Copeland For info, phone (305) 588-9886

ANNUAL MEETING & DINNER

Sunday, April 15, 5:00 p.m. RESERVATIONS REQUIRED Phone (239) 695-2905 See article on page 3

Art in the Preserve

Saturday, April 21, 10:00 a.m. Phone Karen at (239) 695-4593

Earth Day, April 21

Conservancy, 9am – 3pm Naples Zoo, 10am-3pm See article on page 3

For info, phone (239) 695-2905 or see www.orchidswamp.org where you can make reservations and download the calendar of events.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 3/1/12, around 11AM, Renee Rau, Manager, Jeff Kneisley, and Steven Bass, Park Rangers, and Dee Leonard, volunteer, observed an 18-inch striped **crayfish snake** on Janes Scenic Drive (JSD) near Gate 2. On 3/5/12, in the afternoon, Don and Dee Leonard, volunteers, observed 3 **raccoons** in a Cabbage palm and on 3/15/12 two raccoons were seen in the same first mile by Dee Leonard and Steve Bass. On 3/7/12, around 5PM, Barbara Stoner, volunteer, observed a 4.5-foot-long **Southern Black Racer** just south of the Fire Tower. On 3/9/12, about 11AM, Fred Savino, volunteer, observed an **Everglades Mink** walking along the edge of JSD near G12. On 3/10/12, at 9:30AM, Rose Flynn and Howard Lubel, volunteers, observed a **box turtle** on JSD near the East Prairie. On 3/13/12, at 10:33AM, Mike Owen, Biologist, observed a male **Painted Bunting** perched on dead Phragmitis about 1.1 miles from the headquarters. On 3/12/12, around 5:45PM, Fred and Barb Savino, volunteers, observed a 4 foot long **Everglades racer** near the Fire Tower.

On 3/14/12, in the AM, Mike Owen, Dick Brewer, volunteer, and Guy & Linda Beaudine, visitors, while near the Ranger Station, observed a Black and White Warbler, an American Kestrel, Palm Warbler, Mockingbird, Mourning and Ground Dove, Turkey and Black Vulture and later in the day off of East Main a Common Gallinule, Green Heron, Anhinga, Belted Kingfisher, Great Egret, Common Yellowthroat, Palm Warbler and a Catbird.

On 3/15/12, at 10:10AM, Mike Owen and Karen Johnson, volunteer, observed a **Short Tailed Hawk** (white morph) flying over the cypress trees North of the Harmon building. On 3/16/12, around 11AM, Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, observed a male (bright orange and black) **American Redstart** while at the East River. On 3/17/12, from 10AM to 2PM, the artists who participated in the Art in the Preserve En Plein Air observed 4 **Swallow-tailed kites** flying over the Fire Tower Pond, 2 **Northern Harriers** (male and female), an **Osprey**, a **Great Blue Heron**, **Turkey and Black vultures** as well as 2 **Red-Bellied Woodpeckers** flying behind the Harmon building and Harmon lake.

On 3/17/12, FOF members, Ray Carroll, Rose Flynn, Dino Barone, Tom Maish and Ranger Jeff Kneisley along with journalist Lance Shearer, saw a **black bear** on East Main Tram approximately 1/2 mile from the gate at about 3:30 PM. On 3/18/12, Mike Cullinan, FOF member, observed an adult **Bobcat** north of G12 and 2 **Raccoons** south of G12. On 3/20/12, around 8:30AM, Don Leonard observed an **Everglades Mink** halfway between Gate 2 and Gate 7 going south to north across JSD. On 3/22/12, around 5PM, Mike Owen observed an adult **Florida Panther** on West Main/Gate 7 west of the the cabins. On 3/24/12, around 10:30 AM, David Sose, visitor, while on JSD was flagged by a woman about 1-1/2 miles north of K2 and 100 yards north of the first curve after K2. The woman was excited and had just seen a **Florida Panther** cross the drive from west to east. He stopped and waited with the lady about 20 minutes, but the panther did not return to the drive.

On 3/25/12, after the FOF picnic, Rick Tuttle, visitor, and Jean Stefanik, volunteer from New Hampshire, observed a **Northern Harrier** flying over the prairie in the first mile of JSD and later while on driving north on SR 29 observed 4 **Swallow-tailed Kites** flying above. On 3/26/12, at 1:21PM, Mike Owen observed 10 **Cedar Waxwings** fly over the Ranger Station calling then perch in an oak tree and fly off.

See more reports plus photos on page 4.

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

Perceptions of Panthers

by Dennis Giardina

There's one thing I've always heard said about opinion and that is that everybody has one. There is a sort of popular notion about opinion that suggests that any one person's opinion is just as valid or relevant as anyone else's about any topic but, folks, that's just not true. In general our opinions are composed of what we see and read, what we hear other people say, what we think, feel and intuit and what we have evidence to support. That last factor, evidence, should be the most critical component of an opinion but in many cases it is the one that is most often lacking. Some subjects lend themselves to a more egalitarian evaluation, like those where evidence is scant or absent. Ask anyone their opinion about god or heaven or UFO's for example and you'll get a different one every time. If you were to base your analysis of validity or truth upon the evidence available, it would be impossible to determine who was more or less right.

In the case of the physical world however there is a tried and true way to measure and evaluate the legitimacy of anyone's opinion or explanation, regarding any topic or phenomenon. That's the scientific method and it's really pretty simple: You ask a question or observe something interesting. You find out as much as you can about it. You come up with an explanation or hypothesis. You design an experiment and continue to collect all the physical evidence possible. You analyze the results of your experiment and the data you've collected and you come to a conclusion. Then, you communicate the results. If you were to have two people approach you with differing opinions about the same subject, one with the support of this thoughtful analysis and one without – who do you side with? Anyway, I've heard a lot of opinions about Florida panthers (Puma concolor corvii) and I've heard opinion and misinformation being portrayed as truth in and around the communities surrounding Fakahatchee and the Big Cypress. This kind of bugs me and I'd like to clear up a couple of things because there's actually a lot known about panthers and their biology (the Puma organism), their ethology (behavior) and ecology (interactions with their environment). For now I'll focus on a couple of the topics about which I've heard incorrect opinions offered as facts: How many panthers are out there? Where they came from and how big do they get?

How many are there? Honestly, who the hell knows? The person who can get you as close as possible is Roy McBride. I've talked and written a lot about him but he is a wildlife biologist, a master animal tracker and houndsman. He has worked with Florida panthers in the wild longer than anyone and he completes a synoptic survey every year using radio telemetry data, trail cameras and his hound dogs to determine the number of known, adult panthers. His 2010 number was 115. Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission then uses their own population modeling program that estimates the likely range of adult panthers, which in 2010 was 100-160. I met a hunter on a trail in Big Cypress not long ago who said to me, "There has to be at least 250 panthers in Big Cypress!" He was a good guy and was willing to reconsider his estimate when I explained to him that if he saw the home ranges of the radio-collared panthers overlaid upon a map of Big Cypress like I have, he would see that there just isn't enough habitat for 250 panthers.

Where did they come from? I gave a talk on panthers to an environmental group in Everglades City a few years ago and as I was putting away my projector, a busboy who was cleaning a

table near me said, "There's no such thing as a Florida panther." I said, "Yeah, I hear you," thinking that he meant that all *Puma* subspecies are essentially the same whether it's a mountain lion, cougar or panther. He said, "Then why'd you tell all them people all them lies?" When I tried to explain, he cut me off and said, "I know for a fact all them panthers came from," – are you ready for this – "Colorado." I said, "Colorado?" Then he said something about an uncle's friend's brother or something and my eyes just started to glaze over. I asked him if he had any evidence and could he possibly publish his theory in a scientific journal? He said he didn't need to. I told him that if he ever did, I would read it but until then I'd go with what there is evidence to support.

Until the 1800's, pumas ranged all across what is now the United States. During that century as the nation began to grow and push west, forests were leveled, game animals were unsustainably harvested and large animals, especially predators like pumas, wolves and bears were persecuted then eliminated in many areas. By about the 1950's, pumas had been extirpated east of the Mississippi River except for a small population that clung to existence around the swamps and flooded grasslands of South Florida, the Florida panther. In 1995, after everything possible was tried and failed to recover the isolated and inbred Florida panthers, the multi-agency recovery team decided to try genetic introgression. They contracted Roy McBride to capture 8 female pumas in Texas (where the nearest viable puma population exists) and they were released across the Everglades and Big Cypress Region. Seventeen years ago there were probably less than 50 adult Florida panthers in the wild. The Texas females and their kittens delivered what they needed most, healthy genes. Interestingly there is genetic evidence that before the Texas Puma introduction, other pumas were released and/or escaped and bred with Florida panthers in the wild as well.

How big do they get? Some of the more popular misconceptions that I've heard opined go like this, "Florida panthers were fine and never bothered anyone." "The Texas Pumas are bigger and more aggressive." I've heard people talk about seeing panthers "big as an African Lion." Male panthers can get pretty big and if you saw one at close range, you'd be impressed but I've personally weighed a lot of them over the years and I've never seen one over 150 lbs. An average female African lion weighs in at about 300 lbs. The largest female panther I've handled was less than 100 lbs but they average around 80 lbs. I can see why someone would think the old panthers were so quiet and "no problem." There were hardly any of them; they were practically extinct. Regardless, now that there are more pumas in the environment, they will be seen more often and there will be more human/panther interactions. My personal opinion is that Florida panthers have a right to be here. They were here first. I believe our two species can coexist but it's up to us. We have to be very aware of them and do what we can not to attract them to our properties and our communities. We need to better protect our pets and our livestock too, especially at night. Panthers are wild animals and apex predators. They must continue to be inhabitants of wilderness areas. To coexist, panthers must remain extremely wary of us.

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.

BOARD MEMBER ELECTIONS

Ballots are being sent out on April 2. There are 8 candidates standing for 8 positions. Brief biographies are included with the ballots. Please return your ballot to give a vote of confidence to our new board members.

April 2 Ballots and bios mailed to membership (US Mail)

April 12 Completed ballots postmarked by this date

April 15 Election results announced at Annual Meeting

Allen Caldwell, Chairman, Nominating Committee

District 4 Volunteer Appreciation Picnicby Jeff Kneisley

On March 3 at Paynes Creek Historic State Park, Park Service staff and volunteers gathered to recognize and highlight the contributions made by volunteers in the past year. We nominated volunteers from Fakahatchee for two categories. The first was CSO/Park long term project which is the ongoing repair and interpretation of the Boardwalk. The nomination included Dick and Edite Hughes, Caryl and Nelson Tilden, Bud Scott, Glen Stacell and Kathy Hatch. The second nomination was for Outstanding Volunteer Team which consisted of Joe Weber, Carol Arrasmith, and Don Leonard. These three folks have been responsible for much of the maintenance on Janes' Scenic Drive in the past year.

District 4 Assistant Bureau Chief B.J. Givens presented all of the nominations. Linda Koreny was present to accept the nomination on behalf of the Boardwalk crew who were unable to attend. The memento of the nomination was a golden 2"x4" piece of wood that symbolized the ongoing repair work. Mr. Givens highlighted that the original boardwalk dates to 1981 and that it is the most popular use area of Fakahatchee.

The Janes' team nominees received a golden rock representing the road. The two projects were a wonderful representation of Fakahatchee as they provide a window into the expertise and dedication of the volunteers that serve Fakahatchee and the visitors.



Thanks to Ralph Arwood for permission to print this photo of a Florida Panther. See his website www.ralpharwood.com.

ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING L DINNER



Join us on **Sunday, April 15**, at the Everglades Seafood Depot Restaurant in Everglades City for our final event of the winter season to hear the results of the Board elections, news about plans for the Boardwalk, the President's report, and an illustrated informative talk about pythons. The menu will be a roast beef buffet (a big hit at our Welcome-Back Dinner in December).

The featured speaker is Larry Perez who will talk about "Pythons in the Everglades; A Decade of Change". Larry has been a ranger at several southeast Florida parks and has just published a book *Snake in the Grass* which he will be signing for us after the dinner.

Reservations are required. You can send a check with the booking form or pay online with a credit/debit card at our website (click on Events). For info, phone (239) 695-2905.



ANNUAL PICNIC

Almost 100 people contributed wonderful food for our annual event in the Mesce Pavilion in Copeland. Thanks to them and to all the volunteers who helped out during the day. And, especially, thanks to the donors of our raffle prizes: Jo-Ann Sanborn, Bill Mesce, Patty Huff, and WinCar Hardware.

During the afternoon, Jane Parks (seen above with Tom Maish) was presented with a plaque in appreciation of her efforts in the 1960s and 1970s to save the Fakahatchee from development.

EARTH DAY ON APRIL 21

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida in Naples will have a festival from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and offers walks, talks, food, and entertainment. For info, see www.conservancy.org.

Naples Zoo is holding a "Party for the Planet", a fun outing mostly aimed at the kiddies, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. For more info, see www.napleszoo.com or phone (239) 262-5409.

FOF will have a booth at both these events to talk with visitors and pass out literature so stop by for a chat. If you would like to help out at either venue, please phone Glen at (239) 348-3345



Thanks to Rose Flynn for this photo of the box turtle that she and Howard Lubel moved off Janes Scenic Drive on March 10 (see MOZone on page 1).

Hawk at Boardwalk

by Francine Stevens

On Sunday, 11 March, I spent an hour at the boardwalk pond chatting with folks. There was a Red Shoulder hawk very close on a branch. He's often there and folks just marvel at how he just sits there un-fazed by everyone. All of a sudden he swooped down aiming for the hand of the fellow that was sitting quietly next to me; the hawk then flew so close over my head I felt his wings, then he landed on a branch behind me a couple of yards away. Everyone was startled and amazed at how quickly all this took place and the fellow next to me was happy to report that although the hawk nipped at his fingers he still had all five of them. An exciting moment!

Alligator Tale

by Alan Miller & Patricia Stout

On Thursday, March 8, a number of us were on the platform at the end of the boardwalk in your park. We were very pleased to observe a medium sized alligator come out of the brush and cross the pond to where another medium sized alligator was resting. Very suddenly we heard very loud crashing coming from the brush and heard a loud roar that sounded much like a lion. A very large alligator emerged with its mouth wide open. It confronted the interloper and a very turbulent battle ensued. The smaller alligator very quickly exited the pond when it broke free. The large alligator followed it to make sure that it left the pond. The remaining smaller alligator then nuzzled up to the large alligator and actually placed its front leg over its back. We all assumed that the interloper was a male and was interested in what we also assumed was a female. The large alligator was assumed to be a male defending his territory. Among the group, we were able to capture the event on a series of photographs.

On our walk back to the parking lot we met Mike Owen who we assumed was a park naturalist. He was extremely interested in our experience.



Dino Barone took this picture when he was out in the strand at the Carroll Camp over the weekend of March 16-18. You can see more photos on our FaceBook page. Just follow the link from our website www.orchidswamp.org.



Francine Stevens also sent us report from the Boardwalk on March 24: Today I had the luck of hearing a Pileated Woodpecker drumming on a dead tree top near the pond; the hollow tree created quite an echo so everyone gathered around. The next thing I knew I was surrounded by photographers with serious zooms on their cameras. The Pileated was getting more camera shots than a celebrity on a red carpet. It was a lot of fun to see the folks excited and clicking away, with my modest camera, I managed this shot!



Thanks to Alan Miller for photos of the gator fight at the Boardwalk (see article left).

President's Message

"There is a time for departure even when there's no certain place to go" wrote Tennessee Williams. And so it is with my term as FOF's president which ends at our annual meeting dinner on April 15 at the Everglades Seafood Depot. While I am certain this year passed no more quickly then the sixty three that preceded it, the activities and accomplishments of our Friends' group made it seem so much faster to me. Rather then list those activities and accomplishments, which I think are noteworthy, I prefer to share some more personal thoughts about my year as president.

In the last year, I learned more about the ecology of the Fakahatchee and saw more of its unique beauty than I had known or seen in my previous ten years of visitation. I want to thank some new friends as well as some old ones for these lessons and experiences. The Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve Park is distinct from the Big Cypress, the Panther Preserve, Collier-Seminole, Corkscrew Swamp and Everglades National Park. Rose and I have explored these places as well and while they are all special, in my opinion, none are as diverse, alluring and beautiful as the park we have adopted and which has adopted us. The Fakahatchee is home.

So, while I have no certain place to go, I know that I will be frequenting the prairies and swamps of the Fakahatchee as often as possible. This is truly a special place that deserves our continued commitment.

I want to thank our board of directors and members for giving me the opportunity to participate in the enhancement and preservation of the park. I especially want to thank those volunteers who came out on work days and those who rebuilt the boardwalk observation platform for their selfless contributions. Whatever successes we have had were due to the hard work of lots of people.

I hope to see you in the swamp. Howard Lubel

EXOTIC ANIMALS ON STATE LANDS?

A bill passed by our legislature and awaiting action by Governor Scott would allow zoos and aquariums to lease public lands for wildlife breeding and research. If signed into law by the governor, this legislation (HB 1117 and its Senate companion) has the potential to impact our public lands and native flora and fauna.

Pursuant to our by-laws, FOF cannot take a position on this legislation. However, as citizens we can express our individual opinions on matters important to our state resources. If you would like additional information on this legislation, email FOF member Frank Denninger at gladesman@gmail.com.

You can contact Governor Scott at 850 488-7146 or link to http://www.flgov.com/contact-gov-scott/email-the-governor/

BOARDWALK REPORT

March is always a busy month on the Boardwalk as we welcome visitors enjoying a Spring break from school and work. We have had beautiful weather this year, but occasionally a sudden downpour has caught us off guard! Fortunately our guests do not seem to worry about getting a little wet. They just keep on walking to the end and usually join us in a laugh about it. Since Hurricane Wilma in October 2005, there is no longer enough canopy anywhere along the Boardwalk to protect us from rain. It's good to be prepared because the end of the walk is over a half mile from your car!

Although the eagle pair was not successful this year, the osprey nest is in use and the mother alligator with nine babies is visible nearly every day along the canal approaching the wooden boardwalk. The most common snake observed this month has been the black racer and we often see one along the edge of the path near the Otter sign. Occasionally, a cottonmouth was seen basking in the sun on the turn across from the second rest bench. Our two female alligators are still in the pond but they are often in the alligator flag and not easily spotted from the observation deck. Neither of them has raised young in the pond for three years. Recently we had a report that a third alligator entered the pond but was promptly driven off by the larger of the females. A male suitor not considered worthy? Maybe a 'hostile takeover' attempt by another female?

We always enjoy the children that visit the boardwalk with their families in March. Of course they are glad to be on vacation, but it's more than that. They ask good questions and get into lively conversations with us about other things that they have seen. They show us pictures they have taken and ask, "What kind of a snake is this?" They are experts with digital cameras and can bring up clear explanations of things from their phones! What an incredible amount of information is at the tip of their fingers if they are motivated to seek it. Those who are excited about nature are easily identified. There is a look of enthusiasm in their face and a sound in their voice. They are alive in every sense of the word. They make our day!

As always, our hard working volunteers are working behind the scenes. The boardwalk has been greatly improved this year under the direction of Dick Hughes. The observation deck was completely replaced in December and eleven areas that had begun to sag a bit have been raised and leveled. Many new decking boards and railings have replaced deteriorated ones, and diagonal supports to the railing have been erected in several places. We send a special thank you to everyone who gives generously in the donation box near the entrance because you help to maintain this aging wooden structure.

This will be my last newsletter as Nelson and I are making a move to Oro Valley, Arizona, to be closer to our children and grandchildren. We have been a part of the Boardwalk team for ten years and take with us many fond memories of experiences that we will never forget. We look forward to coming back as visitors and sliding our donation into the slot. The Boardwalk is a special place and we want it to be there for future generations.

Caryl Tilden Boardwalk Volunteer

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 344 memberships in the following categories:

Individual117Family162Patron51Benefactor3Lifetime2Business9

plus 28 Introductory members. Reminders for the 1st quarter were sent by post in March.

You can join or renew online at our website with a credit or debit card. Just click on About Us and follow the link.

Welcome to new members since our last newsletter:

Tod Dahlke, Lehigh
Don Finefrock, Coral Gables
Peter Haffenreffer, Sanibel
Don Kelly, Naples
Don & Dee Leonard, Carlock, IL
Gayle & Tom Norton, Everglades City
Richard & Nancy Traiser, Marco Island
Michael Wissell, Marco Island



Volunteers at the Work Day on March 10: Howard Lubel, Dino Barone, Joe Surma, Stephen Bass, Fred and Alyce Townsend, Cynthia Marguez, Steve Koreny. *Photo by Rose Flynn*



VOLUNTEER CORNER

by Dino Barone



Our last Volunteer Work Days this winter are: **Sat April 14** – remove Hog Plum & Brazilian Pepper, Gate.15-16 **Tues, April 17** – remove Brazilian Pepper, Gate 15-16

Please contact me by email with any questions at sunnyg8tr@aol.com.

Charles Wright

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc**, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, is the <u>Citizen Support Organization of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State</u> Park, 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 Friends of Fakahatchee strive 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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Secretary – Francine Stevens Treasurer – Dino Barone

BOARD: Dino Barone Frank Denninger Dennis Giardina John Kaiser Howard Lubel
Tom Maish Cynthia Peters Jimene Rinehart Glen Stacell Francine Stevens

LIFETIME MEMBERS: James Nici, Warner Blow

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NEW MEMBERS Please make check payable to "FOF"	_	ship, P.O.B	date ox 35, Everglades City, I	FL, 34139
Individual (\$20)	Family (\$30)		Patron (\$100)	Benefactor (\$500)
Lifetime Individual (\$1,000)	Lifetime Family (\$1,50	_	Protector (\$2,500)	
Business Patron (\$200)	Business Benefactor ((\$500)	Extra Donation (\$)
Youth (\$10) under 18 (birth date	e: month day year)		
NAME		EMAIL	TE 4000500	
STREET / P.O.BOX:	•	<u>AL I ERNA</u>	<u>TE ADDRESS</u>	
CITY		CITY		
STATE ZIP		STATE	ZIP	
PHONE		PHONE _		
MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDR	ESS:			
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