



The Ghost Writer

DECEMBER 2011

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 islandgirlm@msn.com

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2nd Saturday, 3rd Tuesday

Saturday, December 10

Tuesday, December 20

See article on page 6

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, Jan 15, 10:00 a.m.

Ranger Station, Copeland

For info, phone (305) 588-9886

EVERGLADES ULTRAS

Saturday, Jan 21, from 6:00 a.m.

50m, 50k, 25k marathons

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

See www.Evergladesultras.com

PLAN AHEAD

Jan 21: Everglades Ultras

Jan 21: Coastal Cruise

Feb 11: Everglades Paddle-In

Feb 25: Coastal Cruise

March 10: Coastal Cruise

March 25: Members' Picnic

March 25: Coastal Cruise

April 15: Annual Dinner

For info, phone (239) 695-2905 or see our website www.orchidswamp.org where you can book online or print out a reservation form. You can also download the calendar of events.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 10/18/11, in the mid afternoon, Donna Day and Ernie Winn, visitors, observed a **Limpkin** walking on Janes Scenic Drive near Gate 15. On 10/19/11, in the morning, Wynlynn McBride, Administrative Assistant, observed an Immature **Bald Eagle** perched on a tree branch next to the canal on SR-29 on her way to work. On 10/22/11, in the early morning, a birder observed two **Scissor-tailed Flycatchers** perched on the power lines near the Western boundary of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. On 10/24/11, in the evening, Mike Owen, Biologist, observed a **Yellow-billed cuckoo** perched in a tree in the East Prairie and later heard two **King Rails** calling off of Janes Scenic Drive (JSD) prior to Gate 2. On 10/29/11, in the evening, a visitor reported seeing a **Black Bear** run and splashing into a Cypress Dome about a mile and a half from the Fire tower. On 10/30/11, in the late morning, a volunteer observed an adult **Bobcat** walking south across JSD before Gate 7/West Main.

On 11/1/11 and 11/3/11, both in the morning, Renee Rau, Park Manager, observed a **Limpkin** near the Park headquarters on the waters edge near the bathrooms and later on that week another on SR-29 just North of US-41. On 11/2/11, Carol Aarasmith, volunteer, and Steven Bass, Park Ranger, observed 300 **White Ibis** where the water was overflowing around Gate 7 and about a mile beyond on JSD. On 11/5/11, around noon, while trimming along Jones Grade, Howard Lubel, Jim & Niki Woodward and Henry Clifford, volunteers, observed 3 **Florida Panthers** including 1 adult and 2 kittens about 30 pounds apiece run to the West on Jones Grade. On 11/5/11, Steven Bass and Karen Relish, OPS Park Ranger, observed an approximately 3.5 foot long **Southern Black Racer** climbing a Brazilian Pepper about 15 to 20 feet high then extended itself along a top branch of the pepper in the sun.

On 11/7/11, around 9AM, Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, observed a approx. 6-inch **Southern Ring-necked Snake** and 6 **Whip (Psuedo) Scorpions** near the Park shop. On 11/9/11, around 9:45AM, Rick Cruz observed a **Rreen Ribbon Snake** and 3 **Limpkins** along JSD. On 11/10/11, around 3:30PM, a visitor observed an **Everglades Mink** crossing between G7 and K2. On 11/11/11, around 1:30PM, Dennis Giardina, volunteer, observed a **Short Tailed Hawk White Morph** fly East to West over East Main. On 11/19/11, in mid morning, Steven Bass observed about a 70 pound **Florida Panther** walk on JSD south from G12 to G8. On 11/22/11, around 2:30PM, Karen Johnson, volunteer, observed a **Florida Black Bear** cross West to East past G16/Mud tram and proceeded to dig.

On 11/23, Rose Flynn, volunteer, while bicycling toward Gate 19, observed a **Short-tailed Shrew** along the side of JSD about a quarter mile north of Gate 15 while it was burrowing into the leaves along the side of the road (*photo, page 2*). On 11/25/11, David Sose, visitor and photographer, observed a 5 foot long **Yellow Rat Snake** climbing possibly a Gumbo limbo tree about two miles north of K2 (*photo, page 5*). On 11/27/11, around 8:15AM, Jeff Kneisly, Park Ranger, observed 2 **Belted Kingfishers** flying around the vicinity of Park Headquarters.

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

President's Message

The rewards of being an FOF member are usually found on the boardwalk or in the swamp rather than at the Seafood Depot in Everglades City. Yet our "Welcome Back" dinner at the Depot on Saturday, December 3, provided 85 FOF members and guests another membership reward. In addition to good food, the audience was treated to a talk, both informative and inspiring, by Nathaniel Reed. Mr. Reed, an advisor to numerous Florida governors and an assistant secretary of interior in the Nixon administration, has been an activist on behalf of the environment for more than fifty years. He has recently partnered with Bob Graham and others to form the Florida Conservation Coalition. Mr. Reed, one of the early advocates for the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, offered insights into the important environmental battles both fought and remaining to be waged in Florida today. He also offered some interesting history behind the park's establishment. Many thanks to our historian, Franklin Adams, for arranging both Mr. Reed's presentation and standing with him in the campaign to save the Fakahatchee. Another well deserved thanks goes to our events chair, Cynthia Peters, for the thoroughly enjoyable evening.

The Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk continues to demand and receive lots of attention. Park manager, Renee Rau, unveiled DEP's most recent concept for the Boardwalk Facilities Development project at the dinner. While the design focused on the visitor center area, it offered an exciting glimpse into the boardwalk's future. FOF's board of directors welcomes assistance from any member with fund raising skills or experience managing a capital campaign to help bring this project to groundbreaking.

While we are looking into the boardwalk's future, we are actively protecting its present life. Due to structural problems, FOF volunteers along with park rangers have closed the observation platform area and are beginning a partial reconstruction project to keep it safe for our ever increasing visitors. FOF thanks members, Nelson Tilden, Dick Hughes and Bud Scott for their hours of volunteer labor dedicated to the reconstruction of the platform and supporting structure.

As always, you can contact me at lubelm@aol.com with your thoughts, comments, or offers of assistance. Please remember, we can use your help.

See you in the swamp.

Howard Lubel



The tiny (4-5 inches) Short-tailed Shrew spotted by Rose Flynn and photographed by her (see *MOZone*, page 1).

NATHANIEL REED VISIT

by Marya Repko

Eminent environmentalist Nathaniel Reed, recently honored as a "Great Floridian", recounted at the FOF "Welcome Back" Dinner/Talk on December 3 the important issues in 1970. Something was done about raw sewage being poured into the sea on both coasts. The proposed Jetport in the Big Cypress was quashed, thanks to efforts by Joe Browder and Marjory Stoneman Douglas and by his own intervention with Governor Claude Kirk and President Richard Nixon.

1970 was also the year when Reed was invited to tour the "wild untamed swamp filled with plants and trees" of the Fakahatchee with Franklin Adams, Mel Finn, and others. He mentioned the 1972 Environmentally Endangered Lands Act and the "exhausting, time-consuming work" done by Nye Landrum, then director of Florida State Parks, in buying up hundreds of small landowners who had been taken in by the Rosen brothers' Remuda Ranch scheme.

He also praised the Friends for their dedication as "loving stewards" of this "jewel of the environment" and, in particular, Franklin Adams, "a significant environmentalist", for his lifelong involvement in conservation.

After the talk, Connie Bransilver presented both Reed and Adams with copies of their portraits in the "Guardians of the Everglades" exhibit (*see page 5*) and Reed was given an Award of Merit from FOF in recognition of his outstanding leadership in the preservation of the Fakahatchee.



Nathaniel Reed talking with Jane Parks, who lobbied on behalf of the Fakahatchee in the late 1960s, and receiving an award from FOF at the "Welcome Back" dinner.



Before dinner, Reed (center) went out in the Fakahatchee with Frank Lund, Ken Shapiro, Mike Owen, Franklin Adams, Sam Peters, and Karen Relish. *Photo Rose Flynn.*

BOARDWALK NEWS



Reconstructing the platform at the end of the Boardwalk

The work was arduous but tackled enthusiastically by Nelson Tilden; Dick Hughes, Bud Scott, Glen Stacell, and Rangers Steve Houseknecht and Steven Bass.

Thanks to Tom Maish for photo and this comment: This is probably the biggest construction project FOF has ever done. The team has really accomplished a lot of very difficult work to get the project this far along in such a short time. They need Volunteers to finish the job; if you can help, contact Dino (sunnyg8tor@aol.com) to register.

On December 6, Nelson Tilden wrote:

This was day two in the water and I am happy to report that ALL of the pilings are now finished. We installed three very difficult pilings yesterday and four more today. This is quite an accomplishment and could not have been done without the excellent assistance of Rangers Steve and Steven all day yesterday and today. Steven did his frogman act and actually cut roots down in the piling holes while totally submerged in the water – cutting while holding his breath. Unbelievable! He made it possible to sink the pilings deeper than we otherwise would have been able to get them. Glen helped us during part of yesterday and Dick Hughes and Bud Scott worked both days with me. Thanks to all of them!

The next step is the installation of 2 X 10 beams around the periphery of the platform, followed by the installation of the triple 2 X 12 center beam. When those are all in place, we will begin placing the 2 X 6 stringers across the beams, 16" apart. This is much closer than the old stringers and will make for a stronger platform. The center beam did not even exist before, so the deck is designed to be very strong. Hopefully this activity will begin with a work day this coming Friday, but that will depend on getting the wood and hardware purchased and delivered to the worksite. Ranger Jeff is in charge of that activity. I am hopeful that by the end of next week we will be well along rebuilding the platform. The railings will take quite a bit of time, but I am still hoping that we will be ready for visitors in another three weeks, barring any kind of delay getting materials.

NOVEMBER REPORT

The big news from the Boardwalk is that a new observation platform is being constructed at the gator pond! A support beam under the old platform had deteriorated over the summer months resulting in a sagging of the deck in one corner. The old structure has been removed and work has already begun on the replacement of this popular viewing spot.

The water level at the Boardwalk appears higher this year and this really gives visitors a feeling of walking in the swamp forest. Leather ferns are thriving and there are many new wild coffee plants along the path approaching the boardwalk. A tree has fallen into the left pond just before the boardwalk begins. Although it seemed at first to detract from the beauty of the pond, the rangers have reported hearing the grunting sounds of baby alligators, so apparently the habitat has actually been improved. It just depends on ones perspective! In the past week 10 new juveniles were seen basking on the log across the path near the Otter sign. Our two adult alligators at the gator hole have not produced young for the past couple of years, so it will be fun to watch this new 'family'.

All the royal palms are doing well, including the two that lost all their fronds after the frost last year. We did have some palms die during a frost a couple of years ago, but there are two or three new ones as well. We have about 100 royals visible from the boardwalk.

The eagles have returned to the nest and have been seen frequently in the past couple of weeks. In the past we have seen them tending eggs by mid-December so we are looking forward to that. Two ospreys have been seen on their nest on the east side of the boardwalk and a red-shouldered hawk was checking out the hawk nest near the twin bald cypress trees, so it looks like it could be an interesting winter season. Everyone loves to watch the development of the baby eagles so, of course, we are hoping that they will be successful again this year.

The bees are now in their third season, adding to their large hive in the top of the large bald cypress tree on the north side of the gator pond. The hive began on the outside of a tree limb, but last year they moved inside the limb as well. The oldest part of the hive is grey in color now and looks like it is no longer used, but new extensions have been added so it has grown in overall size. One child described it as looking like a dish of potato chips!

We hope you will come out to see all this for yourselves. It is always fun to see old friends year after year. These 'lovers of the Boardwalk' are loyal supporters and we appreciate them very much. New visitors are also a big treat because we have a chance to tell them about the Fakahatchee; the environment and hydrology, the animals and the plants, and the importance of their protection. We especially love the children who have an enthusiasm and curiosity about the swamp and its place in this natural setting. They ask great questions and really seem to "get it". I guess that's really what our goal is at the Boardwalk—to help everyone get it!

Caryl Tilden, Boardwalk naturalist

The Selfish Gene

by Dennis Giardina

My intention was to write an update about the restoration of the cigar orchid, *Cyrtopodium punctatum* in the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. This has been a collaborative effort between the park and Atlanta Botanical Garden that has been generously supported by the Friends of Fakahatchee. Over the past few years we have made real progress in terms of the conservation of this species, but there's something bothering me and that's what I really feel like writing about. Before I do; a little background. Cigar orchids are the biggest and showiest of our native orchids and in the spring, large specimens of this species can produce sprays of hundreds of red and yellow flowers and they can be quite conspicuous. Cigar orchids are a sun-loving species and were once a common feature of cypress domes and the edges of cypress forests. For thousands of years before the industrial logging of the 1940's, a primary forest of huge bald cypress trees stretched out high above the deep swamp. In many areas the crowns of these trees interlocked and created a super canopy. We can only dream about what that may have looked like but we suspect that, just like in the Amazon and other great gallery forests, an incredible diversity of epiphytes once existed there, including massive cigar orchids. I say once because they are no longer common; they are very rare.

A hundred years ago, there may have been thousands of cigar orchids in the 80,000 acres that comprise the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve. Now only a handful remains. To put that into perspective; ghost orchids, our most emblematic and enigmatic species, are rare for sure but Park Biologist Mike Owen has documented hundreds of them. Even after more than a decade of Central Slough and tram surveys, he has only documented nineteen cigar orchids. Aside from the wholesale destruction by industrial logging of the historic old-growth forest and the biological diversity that it fostered and protected, the reason why cigar orchids are so rare is because people collected them nearly to extirpation by wagon and truck loads. I can almost forgive our ancestors for what they did because they lived in a different era, an "Era of Exploitation." In their day and age, swamp forests and flooded grasslands were seen as impediments to human progress and our national manifest destiny so we cut and burned and drained Florida into submission. Native plants and wildlife (it seems) were mostly considered to be commodities and only valued if they could be used or marketed. By about 1970, the zeitgeist evolved and the historic paradigm shifted from runaway exploitation to a sense of appreciation and conservation.

When Mike Owen and I first began pollinating the cigar orchids of Fakahatchee we borrowed some pollen from a lovely, robust cigar orchid that had lived for fifty years or so in a cypress dome about ten miles away in the Big Cypress National Preserve. Unfortunately, that cypress dome was located very close to a recreation area and when I saw that someone had posted a picture of it on the internet a few years

ago, I felt encouraged in a way that it still remained there. In late February of 2011, I went out to check on the Big Cypress cigar orchid to see if there were any signs of flower spike development. After a few minutes of strolling through the dome, I began to wonder if I had passed it. I thought, "Come on; how could I have done that? I've been here dozens of times?" Then I realized the reason why I couldn't find it was because it was gone, stolen. A wave of disgust washed over me and I felt almost nauseous. Someone had scraped that little monument of nature off its cypress stump perch and what I felt, more than anything was, how selfish. How selfish.

We are a selfish bunch, we human beings; aren't we? It almost seems like a genetic defect. I wonder what did the person(s) who stole the Big Cypress cigar orchid do with it. Did they sell it? Were they desperate somehow and needed to steal it to survive, or did they just want it all to themselves? Did they even consider that they were depriving other people of the thrill of seeing that magnificent plant in bloom? Is it now in a private collection or strapped to a tree in someone's yard? Is it still alive and thriving or in decline from stress and neglect? I guess I'll never know. As I try to find forgiveness in my heart for this very selfish act and for my own selfish tendencies, I will remember one thing. The Big Cypress cigar orchid that Mike and I named BCNP1 is the father of many, now two-year-old, juvenile plants that were grown at Atlanta Botanical Garden from a seed pod collected from their mother CP13, one of the few remaining Fakahatchee cigar orchids. We out-planted a hundred of the descendants of BCNP1 and CP13 this year in Fakahatchee and we're hoping to get permission to plant some of the remaining plants in Big Cypress National Preserve as well. Hundreds and hundreds more juvenile cigar orchids, bearing only the genetics of the Fakahatchee cigar orchids, are currently growing up in Atlanta and will be out-planted in the park over the coming years. Even though shadows of the "Era of Exploitation" are still sometimes cast upon the present, our cigar orchid restoration project is a light of the future and part of our collective legacy of generosity and a very tangible result of our "Era of Conservation."

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 State Park. He is Chair of the FOF Vision Committee.

To read more about the Cigar Orchid Restoration project see *The Ghost Writer* issues for:

April 2007

December 2009

January 2010

May 2010

May 2011

which you can download from www.orchidswamp.org (click on Publications).



BEFORE AND AFTER: The Cigar Orchid in Big Cypress which has been stolen. The historic photo of an orchid wagon illustrating the "Era of Exploitation" was taken in 1916 by botanist John Kunkel Small (*From Eden to Sahara*) and is reproduced courtesy of the Florida State Archives, Photographic Collection. See article on page 4.



Traditional Bird Count

Get out in the fresh air before you celebrate the New Year. The Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by Audubon, is on **Saturday, December 31**. The coordinator is Ana Jonas whose email is a-jonas@illinois.edu.

NATURE FESTIVAL



Rookery Bay is accepting reservations for its annual Southwest Florida Nature Festival on **January 13-15**. Activities include walks, talks, and paddles. For info, phone (239) 417-6310 x401 or see www.rookerybay.org.

PADDLE-IN



Everglades Area Tours has announced its Annual Everglades Paddle-In on **Saturday, February 11**, which will benefit FOF. At the event last year, 37 attendees signed up for our Introductory membership. For more info, see www.evergladeskayakfishing.com and click on "EKF Events" or phone (239) 695-3633.



EVERGLADES ULTRAS

Volunteers are still needed for the races on **Saturday, January 21**, which take place in the Fakahatchee. For info, see www.evergladesultras.com and click on "Signup Here".

CANOE TOURS

Our "sister" park, Collier Seminole, just up the Trail in East Naples is offering guided canoe tours during the winter season. For info, phone (239) 394-3397.

Guardians of the Everglades

Members Connie Bransilver and Nicholas Petrucci have put together an exhibition of portraits of conservationists which is now on show at the Museum of Art & Culture in Avon Park. For info, see www.guardiansoftheeverglades.com.



Thanks to David Sose for this photo of a Yellow Rat Snake taken off JSD (see *MOZone*, page 1).

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 321 current full memberships plus 36 Introductory members. Reminders have been sent to those who have not renewed yet in the 4th quarter. Renewal letters with new categories for the 1st quarter of 2012 will be sent in January.

The new membership categories proposed by the Board include Lifetime Individual, Lifetime Family, Business Pataron, Business Benefactor, and Preserver of the Fakahatchee. Donations range from \$200 to \$5,000. Tokens of appreciation include CDs, DVDs, books, and optional listing in our publications. More info to follow in the next issue.

Welcome to new members since our last newsletter:

Todd Battaglia, Davie
Donna Day, Venice
Katy Delise, Clearwater
Ernie Winn, Bradenton

***Best Wishes for a Glorious Holiday Season
and a Healthy New Year.***

FAREWELL TO A FRIEND

We are sorry to report that Board member John Winebrenner passed away on December 1. John had been elected in April last year and volunteered to use his legal training to advise on FOF governance, by-law amendments, and elections. Our condolences to his family.



VOLUNTEER CORNER

by Dino Barone



On November 12 we worked at East River where we installed 2 benches and an info kiosk and painted the trash can. Then we did some trimming at the parking lot near the Boardwalk. On November 15 we painted and installed a new gate (*photo above thanks to Tom Maish*) and installed a new info kiosk at West Main (Gate 7) on Janes Scenic Drive.

The next work days are:

Saturday, Dec 10, Maintain culverts and windows on Janes' Scenic Drive.

Tuesday, Dec 20, Culvert/Window work continued on Janes' Scenic Drive.

Be at the ranger station by 9:00 a.m. Our typical work day ends around 1:00 p.m. Bring gloves, snacks, drinks. If you can help, please email me at sunnyg8tr@aol.com.

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.**, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, is the Citizen Support Organization of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State 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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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 _____

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MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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