



# The Ghost Writer

**JANUARY 2016**

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

## EVENTS

### **RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!!!**

for dates & costs, see  
[www.orchidswamp.org](http://www.orchidswamp.org)  
and select Tours & Events

### **GHOST RIDER TRAM TOUR**

Thursday at 10am

### **MOONLIGHT TRAM TOUR**

Jan 23, Feb 22, Mar 22

### **TRAM TOUR & SWAMP WALK**

Tuesday at 9:30am

### **BIOLOGIST'S SWAMP WALK**

Saturday at 9:30am

### **GUIDED BOARDWALK TOUR**

Thursday at 9am

### **FOF BOARD MEETING**

Sunday, January 10, 10:30 a.m.  
Ranger Station, Copeland

### **MARCH 5<sup>TH</sup> GALA**

**THIS EVENT HAS BEEN CANCELLED**

### **NATURE FESTIVAL**

Rookery Bay's annual Southwest Florida Nature Festival will be held on **January 15-17**. Registration is required for walks and tours but not for talks. For more info, see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org) or call (239) 530-5972.



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### **WELCOME TO SPECIAL VISITORS!**

Representative Kathleen Passidomo visited the Fak over the holiday. She is seen here in black shirt with husband John, and daughters Caterina with baby stroller, Francesca at center, and Gabriella at right. See page 4 for report.



### **GOOD MEMORIES**

Friends and family of FOF founding member Allen Caldwell paid tribute to his memory by installing a plaque in his honor at the Boardwalk. See page 4, 6.

Visit [www.orchidswamp.org](http://www.orchidswamp.org) for events, newsletters, glorious photos, and more ...

## *M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand*

On 12/12/15, around 5PM, Mike Owen and a Canada visitor heard one **Virginia Rail** calling along Janes Scenic Drive (JSD) in the beginning of the Drive. On 12/19/15, Jim & Niki Woodard reported seeing a mother panther with two youngsters on East Main about 2 miles north of Ballard Camp.

On 12/28/15, in the early afternoon, while driving on JSD, Becky Basford, volunteer, and Dolores, an Ohio visitor, observed **Great-Crested Flycatchers, Black-Crowned Night Herons, Little Blue Herons, Anhingas, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Red-Bellied Woodpeckers**, and over 2,000 **Tree Swallows** flying over the end of JSD.

On 12/28/15, along JSD, visitors from Washington State observed **Tufted Titmice, Red-Shouldered Hawks, Juvenile Bald Eagle**, and a male **Painted Bunting** (in the first mile of JSD) as well as heard **King Rails**.

In December, along Janes Scenic Drive (JSD) during the weekly butterfly count, Skip Fisher and Becky Basford, volunteers, observed primarily **Zebra Longwings** and **White Peacocks** and two pairs of **Viceroy**s.

If you want to report sightings, contact Park biologist Mike Owen by phone at (239) 695-2886 or by email at [FOF\\_90@hotmail.com](mailto:FOF_90@hotmail.com)



Photos by Becky Basford of a Great Egret and a Black-Crowned Night Heron on JSD. See *MOZone* above.



Flamingos have been seen near Flamingo! Thanks to South Florida National Parks Trust for this photo taken in Snake Bight in late November.

### **BIRD COUNT**

by Kathy Hatch

The annual Fakahatchee CBC (Christmas Bird Count) was completed on December 15 in Section 8 along Jones Grade by Dick Brewer, Karen Relish, and Kathy Hatch. It was a foggy morning when we started at a little after 7:00 AM. Initially, the fog and mist made distinguishing colors difficult. Later, we saw many **Yellow-Rumped Warblers, a Black and White Warbler and a Common Yellowthroat**. Catbirds were numerous and noisy. **American Robins** were seen and heard, too. Chirping robins will always bring a smile. Of the waders, we saw a **Great Egret**, several **Black-Crowned Night Herons, Anhingas, a Wood Stork** and, right at the end, a **Green Heron**. The Green Heron brought our total bird species count to 30 and a **Black Vulture** was spotted shortly after to make it 31.

We also observed **bobcat tracks, bear scat** that look like chia pets, a **Panther scrape, a Leaf-footed Bug, spiders, butterflies** as well as **mosquitoes** too numerous to count. It was a pleasant morning to be with friends and look for birds and other wildlife.



Photos by Dick Brewer of the foggy December morning for the Christmas Bird Count and the Leaf-footed Bug.

## ***President's Message***

by Francine Stevens

The Welcome-Back Dinner at the Everglades Adventure Center was a success with 83 guests attending but the evening program was challenged by an unexpected power failure just as we began lining up for the buffet. I was mortified – how in the world could this happen – it is something to be expected during our fierce summer storms but not in December. Patrick Higgins, who had just arrived at the Center, came up to me to say he had seen a transformer blow up and light the sky so I was relieved when the owner Bill Odrey confirmed two transformers had failed and the Center was not the only place without power, a predicament truly out of his control. Fortunately Bill had some construction lighting which he placed in the grand room so folks could see better and move around.

As the evening unfolded, the power never came back; in a dim light Jim Woodard managed a very nice tribute to Elsie Caldwell in honor of her husband Allen Caldwell and Bruce Bunch produced a good picture thanks to his tiny camera with a big flash! Our guest speaker Cesar Becarra, unfazed by the power failure, exuded enthusiasm during his lecture on the demise of the Fakahatchee when the locomotives were in the heart of the strand transporting freshly-logged majestic Cypress trees out of the area.

On my way home I reflected on the power failure and how our guests continued to enjoy the event; it reminded me that the Friend of Fakahatchee are just what one would expect – not easily deterred and prepared for all eventualities – a power failure was not going to ruin their evening.

I thank each one of you for joining us at the Welcome-Back Dinner and know that you all helped make the evening pleasant with your company, patience, and understanding during this unforeseen power failure. I will remember this dinner more than any other dinner !

In closing my letter, the new year is already upon us and so I wish you all, our faithful members and new members, a healthy and productive 2016.



Photo of Caldwell presentation at the Welcome-Back Dinner thanks to Bruce Bunch. See also page 4 for report.

## **BOARDWALK REPORT**

by Linda Koreny

It was the last week of the year 2015 and the Boardwalk was quiet. I have often mused about how much I enjoy observing the changes from one month to the next over the course of the fall to spring season. Now I am adding another dimension to that thought which is how much the entire season might differ from the same season of a different year. Specifically, the amount of water still in the strand this year. In fact, it actually appears as though the level of the water may be increasing. Is that possible? Normally dry spots in December currently are still covered with several inches of water. Will all this water make permanent changes to this ecosystem?

One of the adult **Osprey** was sitting in their nest on top of the snag but the **Florida Bald Eagles** were not to be seen on this morning. We did, however, see the two of them just last week noisily communicating with each other, a good sign. Last week we also saw two **Black-Crowned Night Heron** at the Gator Pond and two **Pileated Woodpeckers** busy in a tree near the twin Bald Cypress trees; it was definitely a day of twos.

A **Florida Red-Bellied Turtle**, stretched out on a log, appeared to be posing for those of us on the Boardwalk who were taking photos. Curious, I “googled” this reptile. These Red-Bellied Turtles are *fairly large and can grow to 8-9” (males) and 14” (females) in length. Their carapace or top shell is olive-to-black, often with faded reddish brown patterning, and has a high dome shape. Their plastron or bottom shell is distinctly orange-to-red in coloration which gives them their common name. They are mainly herbivorous eating a variety of aquatic vegetation. Females will lay between 12 and 30 eggs in late spring to early summer.* What I found particularly interesting was that *the high domed and thick shell of these turtles is believed to be an adaptation which helps them survive alligator attacks* which is a good thing as they are known to often bury their eggs in alligator nests!



Red-Bellied Turtle seen at the Boardwalk.

## ***WELCOME-BACK DINNER***

by Marya Repko

Over 80 attendees enjoyed the FOF "Welcome-Back" Dinner on December 13 despite a power glitch. Early in the evening, a blown transformer outside the restaurant resulted in an unplanned dinner by flashlight. The Friends, used to more trying circumstances, forged on and the program went off in the intimate lighting that was available. *See President's Message on page 3.*

President **Francine Stevens** welcomed a long list of distinguished members including Franklin & Kathy Adams, Connie Bransilver & Nicholas Petrucci, and Deborah Jansen. She then named all who continue to contribute to the Friends in various ways, from back-room administrative and public relations activities to volunteering on the ground.

She introduced **Matthew Kruse** who is acting Park manager while Renee Rau is on leave. Matt, assistant Park manager at Lovers Key State Park, said he was glad to see so many people and was amazed at how involved our group is. He is usually at the Fak on Tuesday and Thursday where we are all welcome to visit with him.

Ranger **Steve Houseknecht** reported that a lot was done over the quiet months: equipment status is good thanks to the knowledge and financial support of the Friends, the shop has been reorganized ready for the busy season, and funding for prescribed burns has been received from FWC. The recent rainy and warm weather has resulted in unusually high water levels in December which gives a entirely different perspective to winter visitors who never see and enjoy the swamp like this. He praised colleagues Steven Bass, Tom Mosley (the new volunteer coordinator), and Biologist Mike Owen whose methodical record-keeping will be instrumental in re-introducing lost species in the Fakahatchee such as the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker.

**Jim Woodard** had organized a tribute to founding member Allen Caldwell with a plaque installed at the gator pond earlier that day (*see photos on page 1,3,6*). He invited speakers in Allen's memory. **Franklin Adams** said it was a pleasure and an honor to recognize what Allen had achieved; he was a real gentle man but did any jobs that were required. **Mike Owen** said he found his niche in the Fakahatchee and was glad he could interact with Allen; he admired him because Allen choose the Fak when there were other parks closer to Miami and because Allen had the patience for administration as well as the practical interest in botany. Jim Woodard looked around the room for other original members but could only find **Bill Mesce** who was so dedicated to the Fak, as was Bill's wife **Pam Mesce**.

**Elsa Caldwell** said that her late husband Allen would have been so happy to see so many people taking care of the place he loved. When FOF was incorporated in 1998, after his meticulous attention to detail, he worried "this may not fly" and hoped that as it got larger it could exist without the founders – which it has!

## **SPECIAL VISITORS AT THE FAK**

by Tom Maish

Chair, BoardWalk Vision Committee

Following Park Director Donald Forgione's advice to familiarize our local Legislators with the Fakahatchee

County Commissioner Donna Fiala introduced the Friends to Florida State Representative Kathleen Passidomo.

In December, President Francine Stevens and Tom Maish met with Representative Passidomo to explain the Friends' BoardWalk Vision Project and the deteriorating condition of Janes Scenic Drive.

To our delight, Mrs. Passidomo was quite familiar with the Fakahatchee, having been there several times. In fact, she wanted to take her family on the Moon Light Tram Tour.

Francine and Tom had a "show and tell" program to explain the needs of the Park and reviewed what the Friends have accomplished – the Interpretative Prospectus, engaging David Corban, L.E.E.D.-certified architect, to design the lo-rail ADA-accommodating boardwalk, educational shelters, Visitor Pavilion and to showcase the Park; our proposed Elevated Canopy Walk.

Explaining the poor condition of Janes Scenic Drive, we told how the Friends had funded the replacement gravel with Park Volunteers doing the work to re-grade the surface; that even with these efforts the road needed professional work by a qualified road construction firm.

Florida DEP projects the economic contribution from the Park's 126,000 plus attendees to be \$9,327,733, with additional sales tax receipts of \$652,941 from local businesses. Having no gate, the Fakahatchee collects only insignificant "honor box" fees!

With completion of the BoardWalk Project, the Park could well become the largest attended natural attraction between Miami and Naples! With estimates of visitor growth that could yield an estimated \$15,985,500 in economic benefit to the local economy!

Addition of the parking lot with an entrance gate will allow our park to collect admission fees of upwards of \$480,000 per year; up from about zero now, to reinvest back into Florida Parks.

The Fakahatchee is the "real Florida" that draws visitors from across the globe, often arriving in the off or shoulder season that will boost tourism.

Representative Passidomo agreed to assist the Friends in applying for State grants and promote our Vision.

Mrs. Passidomo arranged to charter the Tram for her family over the Christmas holiday. Glen Stacell, FOF Naturalist, led the successful tour, as verified by the smiling faces of the Passidomo Family (*see photo on front page*).



## GIANT AIR PLANTS

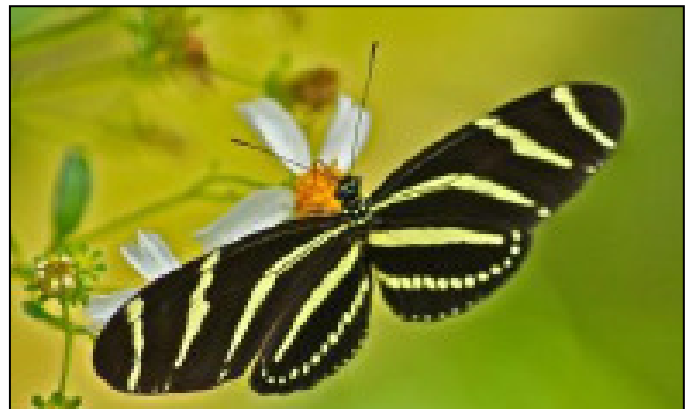
On 12/10/15, a GAPS (Giant Air Plants) Workshop was volunteer hosted at T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve in Sarasota County. Pertinent presentations were given by various experts including Dr. Teresa Cooper (contact info TMCooper@ufl.edu, email subject line GAP) who unveiled standardized bromeliad monitoring protocols and data collecting on the survival and recruitment rate of imperiled bromeliads. Also, she discussed plans for a central database site.

Other speakers were from Naples Botanical and Selby Botanical Gardens and Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. A fieldtrip put the information to use and the attendees had an opportunity to continue to exchange ideas and information to conserve these mini-ecosystems/natural resources.

*Written by Karen Relish, Mike Owen, Skip Fisher with photos, moral and technical support by Becky Basford, Donna Day, and Ernie Winn.*



Fakahatchee ranger Steven Bass at the Swamp Heritage Festival in Big Cypress National Preserve on December 5. Photo thanks to Helen Bryan.



## PHLORIDA PHOTOS AT MUSEUM

Tommy Owen, son of Fak biologist Mike, has a one-man show of his wonderful photos at the Museum of the Everglades until the end of February. You can visit on Monday through Saturday, from 9am to 4pm, in the little pink building at 105 West Broadway, Everglades City, 34139. Admission is free. For info, call (239) 695-0008.

## IN THE NEWS

There was a great 2-page article about the Fak Boardwalk by journalist and photographer Lance Shearer in the *Naples Daily News* on 11/19/15 in which volunteer Linda Koreny is shown guiding visitors who gave good comments in their interviews. See [www.naplesnews.com](http://www.naplesnews.com) and search for "Fakahatchee".

## PANTHER DEATHS

In an attempt to stop panthers being killed on Alligator Alley (I-75) the Florida Department of Transportation announced that it will be installing wildlife exclusionary fencing from the Naples toll booth to the FakaUnion Canal Bridge.

**MEMBERSHIP NEWS**

We have 293 current memberships excluding those in arrears from previous quarters. You can join or renew on our website. For info, call Jinny at (239) 695-1023.

**Welcome to new members since our last newsletter:**

Mrs. Ira Dash, Naples  
Robert & Katherine Gove, Naples  
Warren & Nell Hedstrom, Naples  
Dennis Miller, Bonita Springs

**ANNUAL FUND**

Our goal this year was to raise enough money to buy an ATV for our biologist to use in the park. As of December 31, the total was \$9,245 from 60 donors. Our thanks to all of them for their contributions, large and small. You can still contribute. See our website.



Jim Woodard organized a plaque for the Boardwalk as a tribute to Allen Caldwell. Seen here with him on December 13 are Allen's widow Elsa, also an FOF founding member, and daughters Carolyn and Jacqueline. Photo above and on front page thanks to Jay Staton. See also report on page 4.

**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 400 copies.

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|           |                              |                                  |                 |                  |             |
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|           | Secretary – Jinny Ball       | Treasurer – Ken Shapiro          |                 |                  |             |
| BOARD:    | Jinny Ball                   | Ted DeGroot                      | Dennis Giardina | Patrick Higgins  | John Kaiser |
|           | Tom Maish                    | Ken Shapiro                      | Glen Stacell    | Francine Stevens |             |

LIFETIME PRESERVERS: Bruce & Janet Bunch

LIFETIME FAMILY MEMBERS: Tom & Judy Maish, Van & Jane Sayler, Glen & Laura Stacell

LIFETIME INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS: Rita Bleasdale, Warner Blow, Elsa Caldwell, Peter Haffenreffer, James Nici, Wendy Becker Payton, Ken Shapiro, Carol Vartanian

BUSINESS PATRONS: EarthTech Environmental, Everglades Area Tours, North American Canoe Tours, Nathaniel P. Reed, Tour the Glades

BUSINESS BENEFACTORS: Dragonfly Expeditions

Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc. is registered with the State of Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (CH9223).

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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)    ☐ Supporter (\$50)    ☐ Patron (\$100)    ☐ Benefactor (\$500)

☐ Business Patron (\$200)    ☐ Business Benefactor (\$500)    ☐ Extra Donation (\$ \_\_\_\_\_)

☐ Youth (\$10) under 18 (birth date: month \_\_\_\_ day \_\_\_\_ year \_\_\_\_)

☐ Lifetime Individual (\$1,000)    ☐ Lifetime Family (\$1,500)    ☐ Lifetime Protector (\$2,500)    ☐ Lifetime Preserver (\$5,000)

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