



# The Ghost Writer

DECEMBER 2014

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

Tuesday at 10am

### MOONLIGHT TRAM TOUR

all tickets sold out

### TRAM TOUR & WET WALK

Dec 11

Jan 1/8/29, Feb 19/26, March 19/26

### BIOLOGIST'S SWAMP WALK

Dec 13

Jan 10, Feb 7/13, March 7

### BOARDWALK AFTER DARK

Dec 5, Jan 3, Feb 2, March 4

### COASTAL CRUISE

Dec 22 and March 21

### BOARD MEETING

Saturday, December 13, 1:30 p.m.

Ranger Station, Copeland

### WELCOME-BACK DINNER

Saturday, December 13, 5:00 p.m.

Port of the Islands, East Naples  
reservations required

[www.orchidswamp.org](http://www.orchidswamp.org)

### Swamp Heritage Festival

Saturday, December 6, 10:00 a.m.

Big Cypress Swamp Welcome Center  
[www.nps.gov/bicy](http://www.nps.gov/bicy)

### NATURE FESTIVAL

January 16/17

[www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)



### HELP WANTED – NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!!

The Fakahatchee Boardwalk at Big Cypress Bend, our major Visitor destination, needs help.

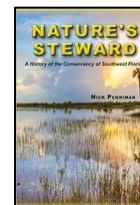
Dick & Edite Hughes are now the total work crew. Since 2013 this dedicated couple work each week to keep our Boardwalk in good repair. Would you consider lending a hand?

Dick and Edite work on either Tuesdays or Thursdays from 8:00AM to 1:30PM. One or two more Volunteers would make the work a bit easier. Although no direct pay is included, the many THANK YOU's that you receive from the Visitors are a great fringe benefit. Please contact Dick and Edite at [RHughes3@netzero.com](mailto:RHughes3@netzero.com) if you would like to help.

### Conservationist Speaks at Welcome-Back Dinner

Nick Penniman, chair emeritus of The Conservancy of Southwest Florida among other prestigious positions he holds, will talk about his new book *Nature's Steward* on Saturday, December 13, at Port of the Islands in East Naples.

The evening begins with a meet & greet at the cash bar and is followed by a delicious meal before the formal presentation. Reservations are required. See [www.orchidswamp.org](http://www.orchidswamp.org) for tickets.



### Christmas Cruise

Start the holiday season with a guided tour to historic Fakahatchee Island on Monday, December 22. The chartered boat leaves from Everglades City at 2:30pm and wends its way through the mysterious mangroves where dolphins often frolic in the wake. At the island, a naturalist points out rare plants on the trek up the shell mound to the old cemetery. On the return journey, birds begin roosting for the night while participants enjoy festive fare. For reservations, see [www.orchidswamp.org](http://www.orchidswamp.org).



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

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

On 10/28/14, at 4:50PM, visitors observed an **Everglades Mink** around West Main. On 10/29/14, in the mid-morning, a visitor observed 5 **Savannah Sparrows**, 10 **Palm Warblers**, and heard a **House Wren** calling off of Jones Grade. On 11/1/14, in the morning, a visitor noted an adult **Florida Panther** and 2 kittens along JSD as well as a **River Otter** around Gate 12/East Main. On 11/4/14, in the early AM, Melissa Miano, Park Ranger, observed a **Crested Caracara** feeding on the ground off the side of SR-29.

On 11/4/14, in the afternoon, Steven Bass, Park Ranger, and Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, observed both a male and female **Northern Harrier** flying overhead in Dan House Prairie. On 11/8/14, at 12:36PM, artists who attended Art in the Preserve, observed over 3 dozen **White Pelicans** flying over Lake Harmon. On 11/8/14, while working out in the Preserve in the Marl Prairies, the Fearless FAKA-hackers observed 15 **American Bitterns** as well as **Wilson's or Common Snipe**.

On 11/10/14, at 3:30PM, Renee Rau, Park Manager, and Don Leonard, volunteer, observed 2 **Florida Panthers** (1 adult and 1 sub-adult) near Gate 15. On 11/17/14, at 2:45PM, two visitors from Colorado observed a female **Northern Harrier** feeding over the East Prairies off Janes Scenic Drive. On 11/8/14 at 11:00 AM Eric Bauer, volunteer, saw a female or immature male **Indigo Bunting** fly over the west ditch into the strand north of Gate 12.

*Dino Barone, volunteer leader, reported:*

On 11/15/14, Dave Halperin's grandson, our newest member of the Fearless FAKA-hackers, observed a **Black Bear Cub** on the eastern end of Pennington Post. We were on the curve transitioning from East Main to Pennington Post, just west of the first washout, when we observed a cub in the trail. As soon as the cub had visual contact with us, the cub immediately took off running west on Pennington Post. Throughout the volunteer workday, Bob Becker, Dave Halperin, Dave's grandson, and myself, saw **Great Blue Herons**, **Ibis**, a few **White Egrets** and two **Hawks**. We got to see a large resident dinosaur **alligator**.

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](mailto:FOF_90@hotmail.com)



Photo by Patrick Higgins of a great egret and a red-shouldered hawk sharing a perch on JSD during the combined Tram Tour & Wet Walk on November 13.



### **En Plein Air – Art in the Preserve**

by Elizabeth Smith

On Saturday, November 8, 2014, a small group of artists met at the blue Harmon Building on Janes Scenic Drive. From there, artists could choose from a variety of scenes. One artist chose to sketch the back extension of Lake Gloria, which is bounded by cypress, cattails, and a grassy area filled with blooming and seeding goldenrod. Butterflies nectared on Spanish needles, goldenrod and a tiny morning glory nearby, while a little blue heron kept vigil from a nearby young cypress tree. Black vultures circled over the cypress dome and a pair of kingfishers playfully pirouetted though the air chattering to each other. Around lunchtime we were treated to a rare sight: a group of over three dozen white pelicans searching for a spot to land. With the sun on our backs and a breeze in our hair, we couldn't ask for a better place to be!

The next Art in the Preserve group will meet on **Saturday, January 10**. To join them, call Karen at (239) 695-2886 or email Elizabeth on [lizardart@gmail.com](mailto:lizardart@gmail.com).



## *President's Message*

by Francine Stevens

The end of the calendar year is always a hectic time for the Board, all committee members, and volunteers – it is the time when all planning for the winter busy visitor season comes to fruition.

The FOF tours under the leadership of **Patrick Higgins**, chair of Education and Outreach, are going very well. Tickets sales are steady, many tours are already sold out, and membership secretary **Jinny Ball** is on her second year answering phone calls for those who need additional information regarding the tours. Jinny's help gives a very personal touch to our clients and supporters and it's a gesture on her part I sincerely appreciate as this personal touch is fast disappearing in our ever-increasing tech world.

I bet you didn't know that all FOF tour guides and their assistants have a duty to attend a Red Cross First Aid CPR AED full-day class and so I attended a class with **Patrick Higgins, Dick Brewer, Glen Stacell, Steve and Linda Koreny**. The class was given by **Melissa Miano, Park Ranger**. You will see by the picture below that we took a few minutes to make light of a very serious topic.

The Resource Management committee is now chaired by **Don Leonard** who has intimate knowledge of the challenges of keeping the Park's equipment in running order. Combine this with committee Vice-Chair **Howard Lubel's** knowledge of trail conditions and their observations on Janes Scenic, the FOF Board is assured that all needs to assist the Park will be brought to their attention.

You will recall in the November *Ghost Writer* I mentioned the Boardwalk Vision committee, chaired by **Tom Maish**, was working on recommending a firm to develop a Master Interpretation Prospectus to tell "The Story" of the Big

Cypress Bend Boardwalk experience. The committee presented their report at the November Board meeting and the Board voted in favor of retaining the Acorn Group Inc. [www.acorngroup.com](http://www.acorngroup.com). **Patrick Higgins**, Vice-Chair of the Boardwalk Vision committee, will be Acorn's primary contact moving forward. Don't be surprised when Patrick reaches out to some of you to be part of a workshop and, I quote Acorn, "We will also conduct a planning workshop with the FOF, Park staff, other key internal and external stakeholders. The intent of this workshop is to brainstorm interpretive topics, establish interpretive and resource conservation goals, and begin exploring overarching themes and sub-themes".

On the subject of the Boardwalk, all FOF members have by now received my letter for the **Annual Appeal** launching a project to replace the signs at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk; this is not just a replacement but a much needed improvement on the signs as they will contain information to help visitors better connect to the environment that surrounds them while on their walk to the 500-year-old cypress, the Bald Eagle's nest, and the alligator pond. I truly appreciate your generosity that will enable the FOF to increase the visitors' conviction of the importance of preserving the majestic beauty of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk and incite them to support us in our mission.

The 13<sup>th</sup> December "Welcome-Back Dinner" at Port of the Isles is fast approaching. I'll be expecting you as of 5:00 PM in the spacious lobby where we'll all have time for drinks and chat before the buffet dinner at 6:00 PM and then at 7:00 PM **Nick Penniman**, our evening speaker and author of *Nature's Steward*, will keep us on our toes with his local stories of preservation versus construction.



Patrick Higgins and Glen Stacell at the First Aid course.



Dino Barone sent this photo of the Fearless FAKA-hackers, Ranger Steven Bass and Paul Joslyn, clearing a fire trail in preparation for a spring-time prescribed burn.

## BOARDWALK REPORT

by Linda Koreny

The full moon was just beginning to rise as the first FOF Full Moon Boardwalk Tour group began to walk up the trail. So different at night – textures, sounds, smells became the major senses used rather than sight; a red flashlight rather than binoculars. The **Barred Owls** were communicating loudly and continually as well as the **Florida Bald Eagles**; we even heard a **Florida Black Bear**.

During the month numerous visitors shared their daytime sightings: In the evening of 10/29/14 Donna Glann-Symth heard a **Great Horned Owl** calling near the end of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk about 100 yards to the west. On 11/10/14, about mid-day, a Birder vacationing couple from Harrogate, in North Yorkshire England reported seeing a **Black Throated Green Warbler** near the Alligator Pond, as well as observed a dozen **Blue Gray Gnatcatchers**, four **White Ibis**, **Palm warblers**, **Catbirds**, **Turkey Vultures** as well as heard drumming and tapping of **Pileated Woodpeckers**. On 11/17/14, at 9AM, Robert Fisher, volunteer, while working around the entrance to the Boardwalk, observed a **Great Blue Heron**, **Great Egret**, **Green Heron**, **Anhinga**, **Crows**, and **Black and Turkey Vultures** flying overhead. On 11/22/14, in the morning, Deborah Owen observed and photographed (*see below*) a large **Florida Black Bear** on the Boardwalk.

This is providing a good opportunity to review safety tips to follow if you have a close encounter with a bear (see the January 2011 *Ghost Writer* Boardwalk Report for more information):

- Remain standing upright
- Avoid direct eye contact
- Back away slowly
- Speak in a calm, assertive, assuring voice
- Make sure the bear has an escape route
- Do NOT run from the bear

Interesting sightings in the morning of 11/25/14 include a **Green Heron**, **Nesting Eagles**, **Red-Shouldered Hawk**, and a 3 foot **American Alligator**.

The Boardwalk closes at sundown so, if the naturalist-led Full Moon Boardwalk Tour sounds of interest to you, contact the FOF website [www.orchidswamp.org](http://www.orchidswamp.org) for availability. The Boardwalk is open and available to everyone every day of the year from sunrise to sunset, just waiting for you to explore it; a pair of binoculars will expand its detail and your camera just might capture something extra special like Debbie's bear!



Photo of Florida Black Bear on the Boardwalk by Debbie Owen.

## EXPLORING EAST RIVER

by Tod Dahlke

Now that our daily rains have stopped, the water level is starting to drop making it easier to spot the otherwise-shy **alligators** down here on East River. The **Wood Storks** are having their morning meetings along the grass prairies and soaring overhead, sometimes in groups of 15 or more – just another subtle sign that all is well in the neighborhood. The **Chicken Turtles** can also be caught sunbathing on the tree branches at the water's edge. I've learned that you mustn't be too eager to meet them or they'll simply drop into the water and disappear like a raindrop. With patience, I can sometimes get close enough to see their long skinny toe nails.

On a recent trip my friend Jenny and I took the river all the way out to the islands! As we made our way through the second tunnel to the south we encountered a **Mangrove Cuckoo**. He was bobbing in and out of the tangled mangrove roots like a boxer eluding his opponent. He did sit still long enough for a picture but didn't have time to stick around and sing us a song. Just past the "cathedral" and Yellow Helmet Orchids is a section of the river that very few people travel. It meanders back and fourth for about 5 miles through the great mangrove forest all the way out to Fakahatchee Bay. This area is much more rugged with large branches sometimes blocking the route or, even worse, dangling overhead barely being held by the vines that traverse the canopy. Just before the river widens and blue sky is visible a pair of curious **Barred Owls** came by to pay us a visit. Their call is very easily identified in an otherwise tranquil back drop. "Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all" can be heard throughout the forest as if the owls were using an elaborate speaker system.

Once out of the tunnel system the river makes a few turns and spits you out in the bay at Daniel's Point directly across from Fakahatchee Island. Once on the island, several non native plants can be seen immediately. One specifically caught my eye the very first time I spotted it. It's located on the northeast side of the island between an old bottle dump and a cistern made of shell and coral. It's called a **Pencil Tree** (also referred to as a Medicine Tree) and is thought to be from the Yucatan section of Mexico. This tree is massive and has a huge beehive under the main section of the trunk. It stands out like a sore thumb against the rows of Gumbo Limbo that clearly have it surrounded and outnumbered like a fugitive. I'd love to find out who brought this tree here and why. One of the many mysteries of the island waiting to be revealed.



Tod Dahlke is an FOF member who contributes his observations to The Ghost Writer..



## BIKING THE FAKAHATCHEE

by Anthony (Tony) Marx

I usually refer to biking off road as 'Fat Tire' or 'Off-road' biking, as mention of 'Mountain Biking' in topographically-challenged Florida usually draws a snigger. But even when riding across our flat landscape off of paved roads, you need regular cruising tires or, better still, 'fat tires' because of sand, mud, and ruts.

I happen to like wilderness biking as I cover greater distances than walking even if I bike in as far as possible, then hide my bike and start hiking. Plus, a bike carries your kit. This is especially handy in the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park where bikers are welcome, with trails suitable for all riders.

Except for Janes Scenic Drive, itself a rough dirt road, the trails marked on the Park map require caution and riders should be observant for anything that could cause injury. Remember at 7-10 mph you approach a hazard much faster than walking. Show courtesy to hikers and be sure to dismount and stand aside to allow a rarely-seen vehicle to pass. These will usually be an ATV ridden by officials or the few 'in-holders' occupying camps in the park.

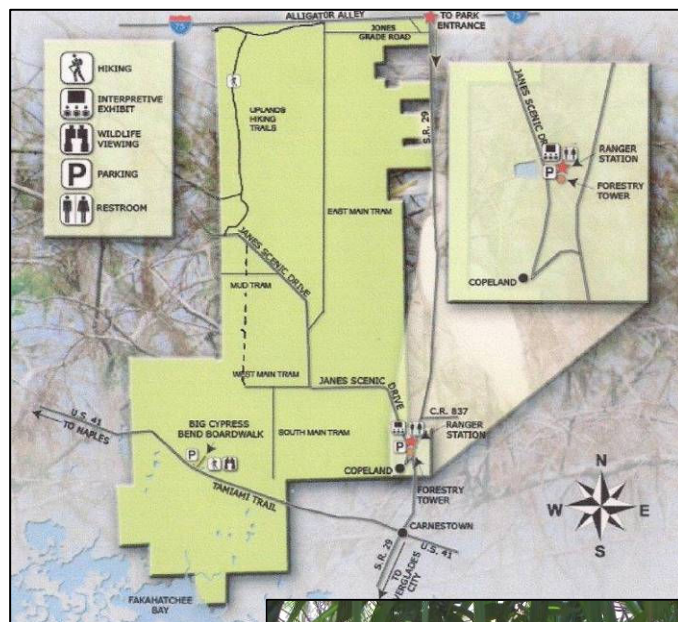
### Hazards include:

- Cypress 'nubs' or short stumps that may be hidden in the grass between or on the double track. Watch carefully as you cross from one side to the other.
- Low hanging branches and vines some of which may have thorns. Wear helmet, eye protection and gloves.
- Wildlife. Alligators may pull themselves up on to the trail to sun themselves. If you see one ahead, approach to no closer than 20 feet and make a noise, wave your arms, stamp your feet. If it refuses to move, turn back.
- The *Water Moccasin* or *Cotton Mouth* snake is a venomous semi aquatic pit viper. Slow to bite it sometimes is found resting on or alongside the trail where water is present nearby and can grow to almost 3 feet. You don't want to ride over it. It's head is distinct from the neck and it has faint markings which vary in color and are sometimes hidden under a muddy exterior; it blends in well with its surroundings. If you see a black or dark gray snake coiled or stationary, keep at least 3 feet away. Harmless grass and water snakes move out of your way fast.
- Except for palms, avoid riding over small branches and fallen vines as they may be armed with thorns which will puncture tires. I recommend inserting plastic tire liners on the inside of tires between the tube and outer cover, found at any bike shop or on the internet. They stop penetrations through the tread but not the sidewall.

### Finding your way when biking or hiking:

Janes Scenic Drive, West Main, East Main, Mud Tram and Jones Grade hiking trails are easily navigated as long as you keep on the trail. But if you visit the Uplands Trail or leave these trails to connect with others it is essential you carry at minimum a reliable compass and if possible a GPS unit downloaded with a topo map.

Even if carrying a compass to confirm direction, you will encounter off-shoot side trails made by ATV's driven by fire and official personnel during the year. While following what appears to be the main trail consisting of double tracks across a grassy prairie you will encounter the occasional old or new trail forking off and which may look more prominent because it was recently driven over. A check on your GPS screen will verify your position and direction. These 'off-trail' trails are also used for the annual Everglades Ultras Marathon and blue ribbons tied the occasional tree will confirm you are on the right trail. For some stretches there are old orange blazes remaining on taller trees.



### The author on the northern end of East Main Trail.

Tony Marx is a Florida Master Naturalist and F.O.F. Board Member. He is also a volunteer interpreter for the Fakahatchee guided tram tours and frequently contributes articles to The Ghost Writer.



**MEMBERSHIP NEWS**

We have 312 paid-up memberships. Renewals are sent each quarter by email or post and may be paid online at our website [www.orchidswamp.org](http://www.orchidswamp.org).

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

John Anderson, Branford, CT  
Stanley Boynton, Naples  
Carolyn Ginther, Marco Island  
Denny & Mary Means, Naples  
Wendy Becker Payton, Naples  
Chip Radeline, Palm Harbor  
Margaret Roberts, Naples

***NEW LIFETIME MEMBER***

Our 11th lifetime member is Wendy Becker Payton from Naples. Our thanks to her for supporting FOF.



Brian Johnston photographed four panthers (a group of three and a single one) early in the morning of November 1 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 400 copies.

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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)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
STREET / P.O.BOX: \_\_\_\_\_

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***MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:***

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