



# The Ghost Writer

APRIL 2008

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, "Home of the Ghost Orchid"

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in April  
(if there are at least 6 people)

Walks will resume in November  
price \$40 (\$35 members, \$15 kids)

**RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!**

phone (239) 695-2860

or email: [islandgirlm@msn.com](mailto:islandgirlm@msn.com)

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

2008: April 5

price \$45 (\$40 members, \$15 kids)

**RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!**

phone (239) 695-2860

or email: [islandgirlm@msn.com](mailto:islandgirlm@msn.com)

### MEMBERS' ANNUAL MEETING

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, April 13, 10:30 a.m.

Mesce Pavilion, Copeland  
for info, phone 239-732-5539  
see page 3 for agenda

### Amazing Adventures "Southern Africa"

by Karen Relish & Cyril Marks

Friday, April 4, 6:30 p.m.

Rookery Bay, Naples  
see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)

### EARTH DAY FESTIVAL

Conservancy of Southwest Florida

Saturday, April 19, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Sunday, April 20, noon - 3 p.m.  
see [www.conservancy.org](http://www.conservancy.org)

### TAMIAMI TRAIL 80<sup>TH</sup>

Saturday/Sunday April 26/27

10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Everglades City  
see [www.tamiami80.com](http://www.tamiami80.com)  
see page 2 for more ...

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

On 2/29/08 in the afternoon, Mike Owen and Karen Relish saw a 3-foot **Eastern diamondback rattlesnake** cross the Preserve office lawn. On 3/5/08 in the evening, OPS Ranger John Klaptosky observed a 2-foot long **Eastern diamondback rattlesnake** on Jones Grade.

On 3/10/08, at 8AM, Chad Lach, Manager of Collier Seminole State Park and Interim Manager of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, observed an **Everglades Mink** crossing US-41 to the south around Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk.

On 3/13/08, Mike, Karen and Renee Rau, Manager-designate of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, observed a male **Northern Harrier** west of Janes Scenic Drive over the prairies. On 3/14/08, Mike observed a **Red-shouldered Hawk** with a **Hispid Cotton Rat** fly to the south over the Fire tower Pond.

On 3/18/08, volunteer Kathy Hatch saw 2 **Everglades mink** running down Janes Scenic Drive and then into the swamp. On 3/19/08, in the morning, Don Harmon observed an **Immature Bald Eagle** on a pile of rocks around Lake Harmon.

On 3/19/08, at 3:30PM, at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, volunteer Ron Kotliar observed a **Bald Eagle** and an **eaglet** in the nest. On 3/24/08, at 10:20AM, he saw the **eaglet** in the nest.

On 3/26/08, Mike and George Wilder, Botanist, observed 1 **Short-tailed hawk**, white morph, circling southwest of the Fire tower and a large **panther track** off the K2 tram.

John Elting reported that he saw a bobcat chasing two small deer on Janes Scenic Drive around 11:00AM on March 15.

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



Members Jim & Niki Woodard sent this photo and email about the Bald Eagles at the Boardwalk.

*We sat on the nest about 2 hours, not literally. The person there before me said she was there about an hour and swears she saw two chicks. I never saw more than one at a time.*

For more about the bald eagle chick see the Boardwalk Report, page 3

## Panther Capture Journal: 2/18/08 by Denis Giardina



Today the Big Cypress Capture Team put a radio/GPS collar on a healthy, three year old female Florida panther. After a short chase, Rocky McBride's hounds treed her up a laurel oak in a little hammock deep inside the National Preserve. After she was shot with a tranquilizer dart, she didn't jump or fall into our net, she "hung up" or remained in the canopy of the tree unconscious. When this happens, the team tree climber has to get up to the cat quickly, tie it up and lower it down. That would be me and this is my account:

When the decision is made to send up the climber, it's usually while the whole team is holding the capture net, trying to follow the movements of the panther to anticipate where it will fall. Frequently a darted panther will urinate as it starts to lose consciousness and today at five minutes post injection, a heavy stream of pee poured out of the canopy right onto the head of team member Ralph Arwood who was standing directly across the net from me. He squinted his eyes and turned his wide-brimmed hat into the copious and vinegary cascade, deflecting it away from him. We all laughed nervously for a second and then returned our collective gaze back up to the wobbling panther above us.

At ten minutes post injection, Deborah Jansen gave the order for me to put on my climbing gear, a seat harness, climbing spikes, a safety line and a rope. It takes a couple of minutes to suit up and I stay close to the team

so that if the cat falls out while I'm getting ready, I can still grab hold of the net and pull my weight. At about 13 minutes post injection, I started to climb the tree. When I climb, I try to concentrate on nothing but the tree, the branches and what is right in front of me. I try not to think about anything else. Adrenaline surges through me when I first sink my spikes into the trunk and start my climb. I know the clock is ticking. I know the veterinarian is worried the panther might not be able to breathe well. I know the team is depending on me and one little mistake could have serious consequences for one or both of us. My pounding heart drowns out my racing thoughts. "Focus," I tell myself, "focus..."

Within a minute or so, I climbed the 25 feet to the panther perched in a large fork with her chest, head and forelegs hanging. As I figured out my approach, I could hear her deep, purring breathing, almost a snore. She was out cold and in a good position for me. I secured myself and then wrapped the rope around her chest. I cinched down the knot. I pushed her through the fork and gently flipped her over to position her for lowering and I called down for the team to grab hold of the rope. It's a relief to watch a panther slowly descending to the net below. I usually stay in the canopy for a minute afterwards to catch my breath and watch the team below go to work.

This panther is now known as FP #162. She is the 162<sup>nd</sup> wild panther to wear a radio/tracking collar since the Florida Panther Recovery began. Although the big male panthers are certainly impressive, the females really capture my imagination. They have all of the same challenges as the males plus the additional burden of having to carry, nurse, feed and teach their kittens how to provide for themselves and survive in an increasingly complex environment. When we come across a female, I feel encouraged that there will be a next generation of Florida panthers in the wilderness of South Florida.

*Dennis Giardina is the former Manager of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and currently works for the DEP as a biologist specializing in exotic removal.*

**Did some of the lumber for the bridges on the Trail come from the Fak?** We know that Barron Collier had a sawmill in DuPont, across the river from Everglades City, and that there was a primitive railroad from his Deep Lake citrus farm to the head of the river. The track must have passed very close to parts of the Fak.

All this took place between 1923 and 1928 when the portion of the Tamiami Trail through Collier County was completed. It was a tremendous undertaking, given the density of the vegetation and then the limestone bedrock which had to be dynamited. A "borrow" canal was dug to provide fill for the roadbed using huge dredges like the one at Collier Seminole State Park.

A two-day event is planned in Everglades City for the weekend of **April 26/27** to commemorate the official opening of the Tamiami Trail 80 years ago on April 26, 1928. For info, see [www.tamiami80.com](http://www.tamiami80.com) or phone Carol Moseman at 695-2159.



## *President's Message*

As I am writing this, we are fast approaching our 10th Anniversary Celebration dinner, which we hope you plan to attend. Those of us who are newer to the Friends of the Fakahatchee owe a debt of gratitude to the founders who saw the need for the FOF and got it off to a good start. When you look at a membership of almost 300 people, a strong financial position and the many accomplishments of the organization, it is hard to believe it has only been 10 short years since it began.

Today we are looking to the future with optimism. Our major access road into the park, Janes Scenic Drive, is much improved and record numbers of visitors are coming to the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. Swamp walks and canoe trips continue to expose many visitors to the wonders of the park not easily seen by the less adventuresome. Our Vision Committee is committed to pursuing a new structure to house a visitor education and interpretation center and to improving the existing boardwalk. Much exciting work remains to be done.

The FOF is looking forward to working closely with our new park manager, Renee Rau. Renee will be on the job by the time you read this. Vice President, Tom Maish, and I have met with her and feel that she brings enthusiasm, knowledge and management experience that will fit well with our park.

We hope you have **April 13** on your calendar. The Annual Meeting of the members of the FOF will begin at 10:30 AM at the Bill Mesce pavilion in Copeland, where we held this year's annual picnic. We look forward to seeing you there.

*Nelson Tilden*

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### **MEMBERS' ANNUAL MEETING**

The agenda for the meeting on **Sunday, April 13**, includes the declaration of the results of the election for members to the Board of Directors, an introduction to the new Park Manager, the President's report, Committee reports, and the presentation of certificates of appreciation.

The meeting begins at 10:30 a.m. but coffee will be served from 10:00 a.m.

### **BOARD MEETING**

The agenda for the Board meeting on **April 13**, which follows immediately after the Members' Meeting, includes the election of officers to the Board.

## **BOARDWALK REPORT**

by Nelson and Caryl Tilden

The Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk continues to set attendance records. At this writing it appears that the visitor count will exceed 12,000 for March. Several European visitors this month have shown us travel guides from their countries suggesting that they visit our boardwalk and we can attest that it is working!

Our **bald eagle chick** is now about 10 weeks old and is often visible in the nest. It appears to be nearly as large as an adult and will fledge in the next few weeks. People are always surprised to hear that it is a baby because it is so large. We have several visitors that come to the boardwalk often, and they are kind enough to set up a spotting scope and stay for a couple of hours to let people take a closer look at the nest. The chick is still getting its adult feathers, so the top of its head looks a little like a "bad hair day!"

We are approaching the time when **alligators** typically begin their mating season. We have seen a pair of large alligators in the canal just before the beginning of the wooden part of the boardwalk that are exhibiting some mating behavior. Visitors continue to be treated to many immature alligators at the observation platform. We think that there are about 20 young ones. One has a little stub for a tail and one is missing the left hind leg. **Wading birds**, on the other hand, have been mysteriously absent from the gator pond this season. Many feel that the very dry start to the winter season may have meant a lower than average food supply.

Last Saturday, we saw a large **otter** in the left pond near the observation deck. A child exclaimed loudly, "Look at the huge snake." That got everyone's attention. It turned out to be an otter putting on a great show. It zipped along, diving and rolling and churning up the pond. We had not seen an otter all winter because their usual spot, near the start of the Boardwalk, has been occupied by an alligator most of the season. We all enjoyed watching it, but the boy was disappointed that it was not a snake! Many visitors are eager to see a snake in the wild. Children are very curious about them. Others are horrified at the thought.

Thanks to the more than 6 inches of rainfall we had in February, **plant life** has never looked better. Buttonbush is popping out everywhere. Glades morning glories are beautiful this year. On the other hand, our poison ivy is flourishing! It is a challenge to keep it clipped back. It grows right up through the boardwalk and tries to take over the posts along the railing. It encircles the trunks of trees, particularly the bald cypress with the large strangler fig that is close to the railing. The Royal palms are doing well and most of them seem to have a clear pathway to the sun. There seems to be a new burst of plant life since hurricane Wilma.

Every year is different in the Fakahatchee and that is part of its charm! Come and see for yourself.



## MEMBERSHIP

We have a total of 285 members including 20 in arrears who will get notices with this newsletter.

The breakdown by major locations is:

Naples & Marco (92) Everglades City area (26)

Ft Myers area (28) Miami area (31)

Out of state, no Florida address (41)

### Welcome to new members:

Jonathan Benevides, Overland Park

Caloosahatchee Bromeliad Society, Fort Myers

Melissa & Mike Kuzma, North East, MD

Lauren Lesser, Fort Lauderdale

Carol Moseman, Everglades City

Tim & Betsy Plum, Naples

David Shindle, Naples

Glen Stacell, Naples

Patty Tuma, Port Charlotte

Kelley Weed, Fort Lauderdale

Tom Wright, Westerville, OH



Member Kit Kitchen-Maran sent us these photos from the Naples Orchid Society show in March with this email:

My Fakahatchee Oasis container entry came in 3rd place, but was also given one of the four American Orchid certificates in the show for artistic achievement. The judges said, "This is exactly what it would look like out in the swamp!" It even had two alligators in it!

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED on the FOF information booth during the Tamiami Trail 80<sup>th</sup> Celebration on Saturday/Sunday April 26/27. Phone Marya at (239) 695-2905 if you can help.**

### What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc**, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation, is the Citizen Support Organization of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, the largest cypress stand 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 mission of the Friends of Fakahatchee is

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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OFFICERS: President – Nelson Tilden Vice-President – Tom Maish  
Treasurer – Vicky Nagle Secretary (pro-tem) – Marya Repko

BOARD:	Signe Backus	Allen Caldwell	Elsa Caldwell	Rick Cruz	Frank Denninger
	John Elting	Cathy Hatch	Tom Maish	Bill Mesce	Karen Relish
	Bud Scott	Nelson Tilden	Jerry Winters	Niki Woodard	Jim Woodard

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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