



# The Ghost Writer

OCTOBER 2006

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc.

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday  
2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, & 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday  
starting November 4<sup>th</sup>  
cost: \$35 (\$30 members)  
reservations required  
phone (239) 695-2440

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

Saturday: Nov 4, Dec 9,  
Jan 13, Feb 17, Mar 10, Apr 14  
cost: \$40 (\$35 members)  
reservations required  
phone (239) 695-2440

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

for Exotics Removal  
Wednesday, November 15<sup>th</sup>  
phone (239) 695-4593

### Annual CSO Meeting Cocoa Beach, Florida November 16-18

Topics include: Strategic Planning,  
Basic CSO Management, Grants,  
Endowments, Prospect Donor Research,  
Strategic Planning, Special Events  
contact Carol at (941) 486-2155  
or Carol.Imbriani@dep.state.fl.us

**THANKS** to Rick Cruz and  
Ralph Arwood for donating photos  
of a bromeliad (*Tillandsia pruinose*)  
and a Florida Panther (PF#147) for  
the new Park brochure.

## NEWS FROM THE PARK

by Dennis Giardina, Park Manager

Last June we were finally able to do something that I wanted to do from the time I signed on as Park Manager — demolish the old Biology Office and trailer. I remember telling the Board last November that its condition was “shameful” and that Mike Owen deserved better. Okay, great, we got rid of that crumbling, collapsing structure but where could we put Mike? John Elting and I decided that our Visitor Information Center in the front of the office was really the only option. The problem was: where and how do we give visitors information about the Preserve? John, Mike, Nelson Tilden and I came up with a plan for the Friends (with help from the Preserve staff) to build an addition onto the front of the Preserve Office, roughly the same size as the previous space. We made a list of specifications: vaulted ceiling, double glass doors, sky lights, lots of wall space for interpretive displays and photography, ceramic tile floor, a counter/desk for volunteers to answer the phone, greet people, hand out brochures, and sell merchandise.

I drew up a rudimentary design and gave it to a volunteer draftsman but this proved to be more difficult than he could handle and, after a couple of months delay, I scanned and e-mailed my sketch to the District Office. My drawing and specifications are enough to get contractors down to look at the site and the plans and give us construction cost estimates. At this point, I am, looking for local contractors. *If anyone has had a good experience with a builder/contractor, please let me know.*

The sign I placed by the front door last May says that we are hoping to have the new Visitor Information Center constructed by May 2007. I think it is still possible but I/we are going to need help. I will have a status report and, perhaps, a list of volunteer needs at the next Board meeting.



*Flooding in front of Park office 9/9/06*

**To volunteer for indoor or outside work, phone (239) 695-4593**

## ***BUGGING OUT AGAIN*** by Dennis Giardina

I would like to inform the Friends of Fakahatchee that I will be on vacation for several weeks in November. This is actually a working vacation of sorts. The first leg of my trip will be another expedition to Guatemala to look for additional parasites of the Mexican bromeliad weevil. On the second leg of my trip I will meet Mike Owen and five other Florida biologists on the island of Utila, off the Caribbean coast of Honduras. We will be working with a group of scientists who are studying whale sharks, which sometimes gather there in large numbers. I will write more about that adventure another time.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the Mexican bromeliad weevil, it was accidentally introduced to the State of Florida in the late 1980's in a shipment of exotic bromeliads from Central America. It is one of many species of weevils that feed on bromeliads that range throughout the American tropics. The Mexican bromeliad weevil is particularly voracious and fecund and over the past 15 years has spread throughout Central and South Florida laying waste to our native bromeliad communities. I was concerned when I first heard about this in the mid 1990's. I became really alarmed in 2002 as I started to document their presence and spread on the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge where I worked at the time. I started to collaborate with Dr. Howard Frank, the state's lead bromeliad weevil scientist from the University of Florida, and Heidi Aspen Rhoades, a biological contractor who was hired to do bromeliad weevil surveys throughout the state.

Some time in the mid 1990's a parasite of Mexican bromeliad weevils was found in the highlands of Honduras by Dr. Ron Cave while stationed there. He now lives and works in Ft. Pierce, Florida, developing a technique to rear these flies and testing them in a laboratory to see if they can be used as a control agent for the Mexican bromeliad weevil in Florida.

The use of one organism to control another one is called Classical Biological Control. There is a rigorous scientific

analysis period that takes years to complete to test potential biological control organisms before they can be released. Scientists look for organisms that are parasitic specialists, organisms that can't survive or reproduce without a specific host organism, thus avoiding negative impacts to other organisms. After the laboratory testing period is complete, four or five separate agencies have to give their approval before a release can be made. Ideally, there should be more than one biological control organism, perhaps attacking different aspects of the pest's biology. Dr. Cave's fly, for instance, preys on the weevil larva inside a bromeliad while it pupates (changes from a grub into the adult form). Biological control is not a silver bullet and it will never eradicate a pest, but it does often times stop the exponential expansion of a pest organism and reduces its impact in its introduced ecosystem. At stake are the native bromeliad communities of Florida in general and the Fakahatchee Strand in particular (where occurs the highest bromeliad diversity in North America). This is something which I personally appreciate and care about very much and that is why I will continue to do whatever I can to help resolve.

Park Biologist Mike Owen was commissioned by the Florida Park Service to travel to Southern Mexico with Dr. Frank several years ago to search for weevil parasites after the Mexican bromeliad weevil was discovered in the Fakahatchee Strand. I went with Dr. Frank last year to the Peten region of Northeastern Guatemala to do the same. This year, Dr. Frank, my friend Tim Andrus, our guide Jose Monson, and I will be searching along the Northwestern Guatemalan coast. We are trying to search for parasites in areas that have similar climates to Florida. The parasitic fly that Dr. Cave discovered is an inhabitant of montane rainforests, areas that are very wet and have moderate temperatures. It is still unknown whether this fly will be able to survive and reproduce in the climatically very different environments of Florida. We native bromeliad enthusiasts are all keeping our fingers crossed. I will give a lecture and slide show about this expedition in June of 2007 at Rookery Bay



*Photo left of Mexican Bromeliad Weevil and above of parasite Lixophaga n. sp.*

# M O ÷ Z O N E

Seen around the Strand – Observations Recorded by Biologist Mike Owen

On 4/4, Ranger Steve Houseknecht saw a **Florida Panther** running south near the junction of SR-29 and Janes' Drive. Could it be the same one that carried away Pam Mesce's pet cat at the end of September? While Cross Construction were tearing down the Miller house in the middle of that month they saw a panther go under a building to the north where it had been munching on a dead deer.

Other animals observed were a **bear** near US41 west of SR29 on 4/24, gators bellowing on 9/12 and 10/6 (a sign of a change in barometric pressure?), a **gator** on 5/30 who caught a 4ft brown water snake near the office pond, 3 **otters** on 4/28 on Janes' Drive, and on 9/7 at around 8pm Rick Cruz and Mike saw 3 **possums**. An **Everglades mink** that had been rescued near SR29 was released several days later on 8/14 by the Conservancy near the office and ran away as fast as it could. A **Florida snapping turtle** was seen by Mike on 4/28 on Janes' Drive and on the same day Steve saw a **fox squirrel** in a pine tree.

The first adult **lubber grasshopper** of the season was seen near the office on 5/4; by 10/5 a pair were seen mating. Mike saw a **monarch butterfly** on 4/27 near Dan House Prairie. **Green anoles** were seen from April through September in good number by Steve, Dennis and Mike in a variety of places. Jay Staton saw a 3.5ft **Eastern mud snake** near Ballard camp on 5/22 which Mike thinks is the same one he noticed dead near there on 9/20. Mike saw a live **corn snake** (also called the red rat snake) on 4/27 and again on 9/28.

Cindy & George Marks from near St Pete are doing a study of bats. They were at Ballard camp with Ralph Arwood and Mike on 8/14 where they recorded the sounds of 4 species, including a rare **bonneted bat** which is on the Florida endangered list. They repeated the exercise the next night with the same success. Mike also heard a **great horned owl** and then heard another one near Gate 1 on 9/28.

Mike and John Elting had an interesting day on 4/18 near East River. They saw 2 **swallow-tail kites**, a **mangrove cuckoo**, a **short-tailed hawk**, a **reddish egret**, and a **bald eagle** with a fish in its mouth. There have been a number of other sightings of swallow-tail kites, including a pair seen by Steve who were possibly nesting north of Gate 19 on 4/24; one was calling while the other circled.

Mike saw a **wood duck** on 4/11 at Checkmate Pont and Steve saw two of them on 4/29 near the pits at the I75 exit. He also saw 3 **wild turkeys** on 4/28 near Pennington Post. Also near that area, Mike saw a **snail kite** on 4/20. A few days later on 5/4 he was pleased to see 5 **bobolink** near Gate 1.

Quite a few of **king rails** were heard in September along Janes' Drive. Mike saw **limpkin** three times in the month; the first time Dennis was with him on Janes' Drive. **Yellow-billed cuckoos** were heard several times but Rick Cruz saw one eating on a dahoon holly tree near well 24 on 8/17. **Eastern king birds** were also prevalent over the summer near the office, in the prairie, and near Gate 19. One **eastern phoebe** was seen by Mike on 8/22 near Gate 1 and a **yellow-throated warbler** was seen by Steve on 10/11 near the shop. A number **barn swallows** were seen around the office at the beginning of August.

Flying up from the tall grass, **American bitterns** were seen by Steve & Jill on 10/10 near Dan House Prairie and by Mike on 9/25 near well 13 where he also saw a **least bittern**. A **spotted sandpiper** was seen on 9/13 along Janes' Drive in shallow water.

Steve & Mike saw a female **merlin** chasing starlings near the office on 10/3. All the park staff saw a female **northern harrier** and a **short-tailed hawk** (white morph) while they were at the office for a meeting on 10/6 and Dave saw one soaring with vultures on 10/10. A **peregrine falcon** was also seen near the office on 10/5

**You can report wildlife sightings to Mike by phoning (239) 695-2886.**

## MEMBERSHIP

We have 248 fully-paid members in the following categories: Individual (72), Family (147), Patron (21), Benefactor (3), and Business (4). There are also 9 members in arrears from the Third Quarter and 25 from previous quarters in 2006 (who will be dropped).

Renewal notices for Fourth Quarter 2006 are being sent with this issue. Please return your form so that we do not have to waste postage sending reminders!

Newsletters are sent to 212 members by email, saving almost \$83 per issue. If your email address has changed, let us know on FOF\_90@hotmail.com.

### Welcome to new members:

Carol J. Hadley, Bonita Springs

Joe & Janet Klagholz, Marco Island

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## NEW PHONE FOR BOOKING SWAMP WALKS: 695-2440

You may have noticed that we have a new phone number for reserving places on swamp walks and canoe trips. Barbara Lewinski will be taking reservations on this telephone line, which is dedicated for that purpose. She can also be reached by email at [blewinski@webtv.com](mailto:blewinski@webtv.com).

Barbara is one of the founding members of Friends of Fakahatchee and continues to keep in touch with the Preserve by helping biologist Mike Owen on some of his surveys. She is also an experienced canoeist.

So, if you have questions about what to wear or what to bring on your walk, don't be shy about asking when you call her.



## PANTHER FRIENDS

The Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge have produced the Winter issue of their quarterly newsletter *Panther Tales*.

The tone is very upbeat with plans for building a boardwalk section in the interpretative trail and the designs for an educational center. They are also spreading their new display around in public places such as banks/restaurants/shops and have an active educational program involving local school students. They will offer guided tours on the trail and are working on special events for the winter season.

For more news, see [www.floridapanther.org](http://www.floridapanther.org).

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## TAMIAMI TRAIL (US-41)

The Collier County Metropolitan Planning Organization met on October 13 and voted to postpone its recommendation that the Scenic Highway designation of US-41 be removed. In other words, there is still time for discussion and persuasion by either side. If you would like more information on this important matter, contact Dennis at the Park at 239-695-4593 or by email on [Dennis.Giardina@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Dennis.Giardina@dep.state.fl.us).

**THANKS** to the Florida Department of Transport (FDOT) for putting double-yellow lines on both approaches to Big Cypress Bend on US-41. We greatly appreciate their effort to avoid serious accidents involving visitors to the Boardwalk.

Visit our website at [www.FriendsOffakahatchee.org](http://www.FriendsOffakahatchee.org) to see the photo gallery.

## What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve**, 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, SR-29, Fakahatchee Bay, and Picayune State Forest.

*The Ghost Writer* newsletter is edited by Jenifer Adams-Mitchell and Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation over 300 copies. (c) 2006, FOF. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter, including pictures, may be reproduced without permission.

OFFICERS:      President – John Elting                      Vice-President – Nelson Tilden  
                    Treasurer – Patty Huff                              Secretary – Jenifer Adams-Mitchell

BOARD:        Jenifer Adams-Mitchell      Signe Backus      Allen Caldwell      Elsa Caldwell      Rick Cruz  
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