



# The Ghost Writer

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## Newsletter of the Friends of Fakahatchee

February, 2017

*Celebrate the weather with a Fakahatchee Adventure!*

### **New Fakahatchee Video**

### **The Jewel of the Everglades**

A new 6-minute video by Jay Staton and Patrick Higgins leads you through the Fakahatchee on all of your electronic devices! As you explore the wonderland of foliage and wildlife, Patrick's narration gives a Naturalist's overview of the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park's vast landscapes.



View the video at <http://orchidswamp.org/new-fakahatchee-video> and see how you can bring the Fakahatchee and its wildlife into focus for future generations.

# Poaching Continues: Be Vigilant

Report by Patrick Higgins, FOF Vice-President



It's been just an incredible year for our high-climbing native vanilla orchid (*Vanilla phaeantha*) which is zigzagging up trees throughout the park. They seem to be bearing seed pods everywhere, perhaps because it's been five years since we've had severe frosts.

Sadly, Jim Winger and I have concluded that someone has been poaching them in the slough where we conduct the wet-walk portion of our weekly Combined Tram / Swamp-walk tour. We know the slough really well, and on our February 2nd walk, it was obvious that someone else had been there—there was fresh damage along our usual circuit (e.g., broken branches, dislodged bromeliads etc. between waist and shoulder height).

We found that most of the vanilla vines around the slough's cutgrass pond had had fresh wounds where cuttings had been taken from them. This must have occurred between January 26th and February 2nd.

## Stewards of the Fakahatchee

On our tours we proceed very slowly and take great care to instruct our guests not to use the trees as handholds or for support, explaining that this to protect the delicate ecosystem and keep it pristine for the next group. They are really good about it and emerge from the experience as determined stewards of the Fakahatchee.

We ask all those who wander the Fakahatchee to help prevent poaching. Volunteers are trained to record and report suspicious activity and the Friends fund the installation and maintenance of a network of hidden cameras to guard against illegal plant removal.

## *Vanilla phaeantha* is State-listed as an endangered species.

Our native oblong-leaved vanilla has the largest flower of all our native orchids, although you are lucky to see one because they bloom very high up, closing early in the day.

**Pollination.** The arrival of euglossine bees might also be contributing to the orchid's proliferation. These solitary green metallic orchid bees are the natural pollinators of vanilla in the neotropics. They were first recorded in fruit fly monitoring traps in 2003 and are now thought to be well established in South Florida.

**Seed dispersal.** That leaves the mystery of our vanilla's seed dispersal mechanism. Most orchids have minute seeds that are borne on even the gentlest of breezes, but the vanillas have the largest of all orchid seeds. Within their fragrant pod, these seeds wear a sticky oily coating and are packed in a paste the consistency of slightly melted Fig Newton. It is generally thought that animals disperse seeds in most of their range. But we don't have fruit bats in the Fakahatchee, so some secondary mechanism must be at work.

Park Biologist Mike Owen and I were discussing this, and speculated that dispersal might also be by water. I tested a ripe brown 9 cm, 6



g pod recently that had fallen to the ground, and it did float. I then scrapped a bit of the seed laden paste into the water which didn't. Perhaps the oily coating also has the additional benefit of waterproofing so the seeds don't become sodden, allowing dispersal by water.

*Vanilla phaeantha* grows on the larger islands of the West Indies like Trinidad and Cuba, and in much of Mesoamerica, but here in Florida is restricted to the Fakahatchee and just a few locations in Everglades National Park.

## Fakahatchee Adventures

### 6th Annual Everglades Ultras to be Run February 18, 2017



This race brings runners up close and personal with the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park! Specific race routes are designed each year in response to trail conditions; Friends of Fakahatchee volunteers clear the trails in the weeks leading up to the race.

There are three distinct trail races: 50 miles, 50 kilometers (31 miles), and 25 kilometers (15.6 miles). Visit [evergladesultras.com](http://evergladesultras.com) for much more information and registration. Be sure to read Bob Becker, Race Director's entertaining [2016 race report](#).

### 2017 Marjory Stoneman Douglas Festival Features the Fakahatchee Experience

The 2017 Marjory Stoneman Douglas Festival takes place at the Museum of the Everglades in Everglades City Feb. 21-25 has a definite Fakahatchee flavor. The five-day festival offers a diverse program of lectures and outdoor activities and attracts attendees from all over the country.

The festival features talks by Friends of Fakahatchee members, some paddling, a Fakahatchee swamp walk and Ghost Rider tram tour of the park. ***Although the outdoor activities are now fully booked, you can get into hear the talks. Arrive early for the best seats!***

- **Wed. Feb 22, 3:00 p.m.**  
"Women of the Everglades" by author Marya Repko
- **Friday, Feb 24, 1:00 p.m.**  
"Epiphytes and Wildlife" by park biologist Mike Owen

For more information, please call 239-695-0008 or download the [event brochure](#) at [www.evergladesmuseum.org](http://www.evergladesmuseum.org).



*Marjory Stoneman Douglas at the naming of the Dept. of Natural Resources administration building in her honor.*

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas. 1985. Black & white photograph. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. Accessed 9 Feb. 2017. <<https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/5622>>*



## Can't Make the Festival? You can still Register for these Adventures!

### Ghost Rider Tram Tours

Tuesdays, Feb 28, March 7, 14, 21, 10:00 am

### Combined Tram Tour and Swamp Walks

Thursdays, Feb 23, March 2, 9, and 30, 9:30 am

### Fakahatchee Swamp Walk

Saturdays, Feb 18, March 4, 11, and 25, 9:30 am

Registration required. Please do so soon, adventures  
are selling out!

[Click Here to Register](#)

<http://www.eventbrite.com/o/friends-of-fakahatchee-4741210771?ref=eorgbtn>



***"Great tour with expert park volunteers. Beware imitations!"***

*"My son and I took a 'Swamp Tromp' led by volunteers affiliated with The Friends of the Fakahatchee, the not-for-profit organization dedicated to the Preserve. Patrick and Jim were great guides. As we passed along the road to the point where we entered the wet portion of the tour, they explained the natural seasonal changes that occur in both the prairie and swamp regions of the Preserve. We also learned about the impact of fire, timber cutting, geology, and the health of the environment."*

– Andrew T., Miami FL, January 2017

## Seen Around the Strand

Keep up with the Fakahatchee Scene on Facebook [@orchidswamp](#)

## Give Residents Ample Parking Space



Alligators are permanent residents at the Fakahatchee, and are fond of sunny spots to bask. This good sized gator has lately taken to serving as the welcoming committee in the side parking area of the boardwalk. At about 11:00 am in the morning, Volunteers Patti and Dave Boesche and Dave's sister from Key Largo discovered this impediment between their cars. Patti took its portrait and directed guests to give it wide berth.

Alligators have surprisingly long legs and good speed, as this critter showed while ambling away. As Friends of the Fakahatchee and Fakahatchee wildlife, we should be vigilant to make sure gators aren't approached or fed by well-meaning tourists. Acclimating a gator to humans in a parking lot could have disastrous consequences for both people and the animals.

## Meeting up at the Boardwalk

Snakes may be cold blooded, but still make a heart warming couple at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. These snakes are members of one of the races of water snake *Nerodia fasciata*. Photo of reptilian affection by boardwalk volunteer Patti Boesche.



## Owls looking for love

The soulful, brown-eyed Barred Owl has shown itself recently. Thank you to Becky Basford for sharing this beautiful photo of this attractive owl.

You may hear this streaky, dark-eyed owl with its brown and white plumage calling out its hoots of "Who cooks for you". It can pass unnoticed as it flies noiselessly through the strand. This is mating season so keep your eyes and ears open.

**[You too can Volunteer at the Fakahatchee!](http://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/)**

Visit our website to see how at <http://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/>

## Membership News

### Nominations for the Board of Directors

Nominations for the Friends of Fakahatchee Board officially close at the end of the day Tuesday, February 28th. As of this time four individuals have been accepted by the Nominations Committee for election to the Board of Directors:

**Chris Gair**

Executive Vice President, Investors' Security Trust, Fort Myers

**Scott Geltemeyer**

Chief Financial Officer, David Lawrence Center, Naples

**Gayle Norton**

Retired, Copeland

**Stacy Wolfe Ed. D.**

Science Chair, Arthur Ashe Atlantic Technical Center, Hollywood

For further information contact Nominating Committee Chair:

Ted DeGroot, [ted@southnaplesrealestate.com](mailto:ted@southnaplesrealestate.com), [239-774-1535](tel:239-774-1535)

## Welcome New Members

Ronald Davis, Barry Kaplan have joined as Patron Members. Scott Geltemeyer, Tucker Kapp and Douglas VanHeerde are new individual members, and we also welcome Andrew Tyler's family as members.

***Patty Huff is our new Lifetime Individual Member!***

Our latest latest lifetime member, Patty Huff, is a former FOF president and currently president of the Friends of the Museum of the Everglades. As Communications Chair Bruce Bunch says, "*With all her other activities at the town newspaper and museum and other committees, FOF still has a special place in Patty Huff's heart.*"

### Save the Date for the Annual Members Meeting and Dinner

SATURDAY, APRIL 8

*A special invitation bulletin will be sent to the membership in March.*

*Join the Friends of Fakahatchee at <http://orchidswamp.org/support/memberships/> to get yours!*

***Thanks to our lifetime and business members!***

**Lifetime Preservers**

Bruce & Janet Bunch

**Lifetime Individual Members**

Rita Bleasdale

Warner Blow

Elsie Caldwell

Peter Haffenreffer

Don Harmon

Patty Huff

James Nici

Wendy Becker Payton

Ken Shapiro

Carol Vartanian

**Lifetime Family Members**

Tom & Judy Maish

Van & June Saylor

Glen & Laura Stacell

**Business Patrons**

North American Canoe Tours  
(Ivey House B&B)

Shurr Adventures

**2016-2017 Board**

**President**

Francine Stevens

**Vice-President**

Patrick Higgins

**Secretary**

Jinny Ball

**Treasurer**

Ken Shapiro

**Members at Large**

Ted De Groot

Dennis Giardina

John Kaiser

Don Leonard

Howard Lubel

Tom Maish

Glen Stacell

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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.

The Ghost Writer, named after the endangered Ghost Orchid which blooms in the Preserve, is currently edited by Next Steps Collective, LLC, which also manages the Orchidswamp.org website. Contributions to Ghost Writer that relate directly to the business and purpose of the Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc. are welcome. Please write [news@orchidswamp.org](mailto:news@orchidswamp.org), subject line: Ghostwriter.

A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION FOR THE FRIENDS OF FAKAHATCHEE, A FLORIDA-BASED NONPROFIT CORPORATION (REGISTRATION NO. CH9223), MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE OR VISITING THEIR WEBSITE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.