

Florida Ecological Services Field Notes



North and South Florida Ecological and Panama City Ecological Services/Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices

Keeping Our Team, Species and Ecosystems Connected

By Larry Williams

If you started driving in Key West, stopped by Fernandina Beach in Florida's northeast corner, then ended your trip at the Florida-Alabama line on Perdido Key, you would cover 953 miles and spend almost 15 hours behind the wheel.

In the hardwood hammocks near Key West, you could see the endangered Stock Island tree snail. In the surf at Fernandina, you could find three species of sea turtles that we protect. And in the dunes at Perdido Key, you could spot the burrows of Perdido Key beach mice. Along the route you would cross about 15 major rivers with Spanish, Anglo and Native American names like Santa Fe, St. Johns and Choctawhatchee. Those rivers hold manatees, American crocodiles, Gulf sturgeon and 14 threatened and endangered species of mussels. No doubt, we have a tremendous geography and an incredible diversity of species we are responsible for.

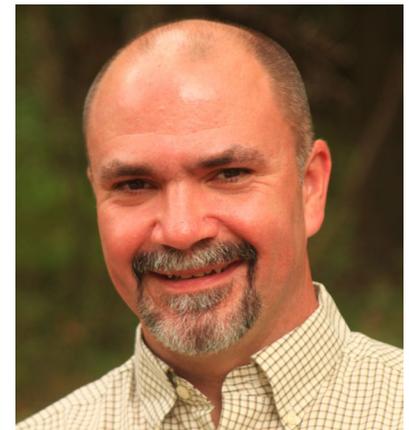
Our work is all about keeping ecosystems and habitats connected, and to do that well we need to stay connected. We need to know what's working and not working in other parts of the state. We need to know who's coming and who's going from our Team. And we need to know who is trying something innovative that might be worth trying elsewhere. Those are the types of articles you'll find here. This is our first issue. If you find something you like, dislike, or could be improved please let us know. Our main goal is for this newsletter to be helpful and valuable to all of us.



With more than 100 people on our Florida Ecological Services Team, who every day work on conservation challenges from Key West to Flora-Bama, we must make sure we stay connected. I hope this newsletter helps us do that!

“No doubt, we have a tremendous geography and an incredible diversity of species we are responsibly for.”

— Larry Williams



Larry Williams, State Supervisor, Florida Ecological Services



Yuma plays with a piece of loose sod from his enclosure. photo: Ken Warren

Orphaned Florida Panther Yuma, Gets New Home

By Ken Warren

Dozens of people lined around Yuma's enclosure at Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park August 21 watched as the young Florida panther curiously, cautiously and somewhat nervously checked out his new digs.



Yuma explores his new home. photo: Ken Warren

Then, a magic moment: Yuma stopped, locked in on a man in the crowd and squeaked delightfully, as if to say, "Hey! I know you! Friend!"

That familiar face belonged to Dr. Ray Ball, one of the veterinarians who took care of Yuma for about two months at Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa. He's one of many people involved in nursing Yuma back to health after he was found abandoned and near death at the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge in January.

Yuma was about a week old, only weighed about a pound when found and was suffering from a low body temperature, malnutrition and dehydration. He was immediately taken to the animal specialty hospital in Naples, Fla. where life-saving measures were performed. Once stabilized, Yuma was taken to Lowry Park Zoo for further care.

On April 3, he was moved to Homosassa Springs and kept in a care facility before being released into his permanent enclosure. "Yuma's doing well now and weighs about 80 pounds," Ray said, beaming like a proud father. "It was a spectacular feeling to have him react to seeing me like he did...very endearing. You can't help but make a personal connection under these circumstances."

After acknowledging Ray, Yuma continued to explore his new home: playing with a piece of loose sod, chasing a butterfly, observing neighboring bobcats and even playfully stalking photographers.

Dawn Jennings, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Panther Coordinator, first saw Yuma several weeks ago at Lowry Park Zoo. "During that time, the Service helped the park obtain the necessary federal permits to allow Yuma to be here," she said. "He looks so happy and comfortable. This is a perfect fit."



Dr. Ray Ball examines Yuma shortly after he arrived at Lowry Park Zoo as a young kitten. photo courtesy Lowry Park Zoo

Dawn explained that even though Yuma is healthy now, he's not a candidate for release back into the wild because he's been acclimated to people since a very early age. "He didn't get to learn survival skills from his mother," she said.

"It's an incredible honor to have Yuma at the Wildlife Park," said Clif Maxwell, district chief for the Florida Park Service. "While we are saddened he cannot be returned to his natural habitat, this will provide visitors to Homosassa Springs the opportunity to view one of Florida's rarest and most iconic endangered species."



Dr. Ray Ball and Dawn Jennings are all smiles after seeing Yuma settle comfortably into his new home. photo: Ken Warren



Perdido Key beach mice, like this one, primarily eat dune plant seeds and insects. photo: USFWS

“This project will hopefully give us a better understanding of how roads will affect the mouse’s connectivity within the habitat,” explained Yanchis. “The mice need the habitat on both sides of the road in order to recover. This research should tell us if the beach mouse can still thrive and co-exist with roads of multiple sizes.”

Biologists will look at road sizes and different points of connectivity to get a range of data on the mouse’s movements.

FDOT will install and the research team will monitor four crossing structures beneath State Road 292 (Perdido Key Drive) to see if mice will use them to connect to their habitat.

Yanchis says the research should provide some answers to science-based questions regarding the proposed widening of SR 292. “This is the first study of this kind for this species,” says Yanchis.

The study will focus on two primary research objectives: To conduct a demographic analysis of PKBM along the north and south side of SR 292 and a behavior assessment of potential road impacts on PKBM. Included in these objectives is the assessment of mice crossing two-lane roads, a four-lane road and crossing structures.

Yanchis is hopeful the three-year study will help biologists better understand the effects of roads on beach mice. They also hope to learn about potential ways to mitigate any negative impacts.

Although the PKBM populations are currently holding their own, Yanchis knows the mice are still very vulnerable. That’s why PCFO biologists want to use the best science available to protect the mice. “Hopefully the data collected will be used for future road and highway consultations across the Panhandle,” says Yanchis.

Study Will Benefit the Perdido Key beach mouse

By Denise Rowell

For more than 20 years, the elusive Perdido Key beach mouse (PKBM) has struggled to maintain a self-sustaining population on the tiny island of Perdido Key that stretches along the Florida and Alabama coasts.

But, that might change due to an innovative, multi-partner project that could expand understanding of the PKBM’s movement and connectivity within its habitat. Listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, the mice need intact coastal dune habitat, which provides food and shelter, in order to thrive.

Essential PKBM habitat includes the primary, secondary and scrub dunes within the coastal ecosystem. But biologists fear that fragmentation of the population may be hurting the PKBM’s chance at recovery.

Whether fragmented by commercial development, road widening, or severe weather, biologists say the interrupted connectivity can leave the PKBM vulnerable.



Kristi Yanchis

“Ultimately, fragmentation can limit or prevent recolonization of the habitat after storm events, increased predation or the harsh stochastic natural events of the dynamic coastal ecosystem,” says Kristi Yanchis, lead PKBM biologist in the Panama City Field Office (PCFO).

With guidance from the PCFO and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, a research team from the University of Florida is studying the PKBM’s movement and behavior related to a potential road widening project through their habitat. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is managing and funding the research.

Butterflying the Extreme Northeast

By Mark Salvato

North America is home to over 800 species of butterflies. Nature enthusiasts, such as my wife Holly and I, are eager to chase, observe and photograph every single one of them. July 2014 found us, along with a small band of like-minded souls, traveling north to New Brunswick, Canada--a region rich in rare butterfly species, such as the short-tailed swallowtail, our primary target for this trip.

The group galvanized in northeastern Maine to search for Clayton's copper, a local species that occurs decidedly off the beaten path. Winding our way through forests and bogs, we soon found patches of shrubby cinquefoil, the butterfly's hostplant. Clayton's copper often flies in early August, so we were cautiously optimistic about our chances. However, after some intense slogging around bog edges, butterflies began fluttering around, including the copper.

Once in New Brunswick we ventured eastward along active logging roads towards Bathurst. Numerous bog expanses provided opportunities to find pink-edged sulphurs, whose larvae feed on blueberries. Boreal butterflies abound,



© Holly L. Salvato

Mark and company saw several pink-edged sulphurs in numerous bogs.



© Holly L. Salvato

Karner blues are the benchmark in successful butterfly recovery and reintroduction.

gray and green commas, white admirals and fritillaries. While Holly and I could have lingered for hours here, our group forged to the coast for a late afternoon attempt at some truly unique species.

Our first destination in Bathurst was Carron Point. Although much of the region's coastal saltmarshes have been lost to development, Ducks Unlimited has set aside a large expanse specifically on behalf of our targets, the maritime copper and ringlet. The maritime copper (or saltmarsh copper) and maritime ringlet were both first described from Bathurst and are endemic to these and a few other local saltmarshes. We found both butterflies in a matter of minutes, resulting in smiles actively displayed on faces throughout dinner.

The next morning we went to Daly Point Preserve, known for the short-tailed swallowtail observations, but, unfortunately, not on this day. A preserve biologist took our group's picture, and shortly afterwards wrote a story for the local newspaper, *The Northern Light*, regarding how a bunch of Americans drove all that way to see butterflies.



© Holly L. Salvato

Maritime ringlets are concentrated in areas where there is more of its host plant, salt meadow grass, as well as nectar sources for the adult, mainly sea lavender.



© Holly L Salvato

Maritime copper butterflies are endemic to the saltwater marshes of New Brunswick, Canada.

Massive flocks of northern gannets diving close to shore provided quite the spectacle at Escuminac Point, but overcast skies kept butterflies at bay. Then however, just as we had started to drive away a dark swallowtail crossed the road. Butterfly pandemonium ensued at the notion of finding a short-tailed swallowtail. Excitement was in air; high-fives all around, while a certain skeptical soul anxiously pawed through the field guide. Then the dreaded words came: “It’s just a black swallowtail.”

Black swallowtails are common across North America, but many among us were under the mistaken notion that along coastal New Brunswick, short-tailed replaced black swallowtails. Apparently not, as our search of the southern coastline turned up only more black swallowtails. As a general rule, in this pastime, when you get a target or two seemingly too easily, in this case oodles of maritime coppers and ringlets, there’s another one that ups the ante.

On the drive home we made a brief stop in Concord, New Hampshire to photograph the endangered Karner blue. Karner blues represent the benchmark in successful butterfly recovery and reintroduction, including this most eastern of populations in Concord. We arrived at the Service-sponsored conservation easement in waning sunlight managing to find a small batch of blues hunkering down for the night. We’d managed to save the best for last.



© Holly L Salvato

Mark Salvato takes a breather before heading into the Karner Blue Butterfly Easement area in New Hampshire.



Terri Calleson prepares to release a green sea turtle at Cape San Blas, Florida. photo: Mary Duncan

Nicole Adimey, Terri Calleson Chosen for SUTL!

By Heath Rauschenberger and Chuck Underwood

The Florida Ecological Services (ES) team is excited that Nicole Adimey and Terri Calleson, of the North Florida Ecological Services Office, were selected for the Service's FY 2015 Stepping Up to Leadership (SUTL) program.

"It's always great to see someone selected for this highly competitive program, but especially gratifying when two of the region's eight selectees are part of our ES team," said Larry Williams, the Service's Florida ES state supervisor.

Adimey, a coastal program biologist, has been with the Service for 13 years. Prior to working in the Service's Coastal



Nicole Adimey shows how to hold a roseate spoonbill. (Courtesy Photo)

Program, she worked in species recovery for several years, including as the Manatee Rescue, Rehab and Release Program Coordinator. As the North Florida coastal biologist, her efforts resulted in the restoration of hundreds of acres of coastal habitat. Currently, Adimey is working closely with the Southeast Regional Office assisting with the Service's contribution to the Gulf Coast Restoration initiatives.

"Nicole has always done phenomenal work in a variety of capacities," said Jay Herrington, the North Florida ES field supervisor. "This developmental opportunity will afford her the chance to build on those leadership successes and prepare her for even greater roles in the future."

Calleson, a consultation biologist, joined the Service in 2009 after working 14 years in various roles on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) imperiled species staff. With her FWC experience and co-location with FWC in Tallahassee, she has greatly improved coordination between the agencies and our collective efforts to minimize project impacts for the benefit and conservation of manatees, sea turtles and other listed species.

"Terri came to us with a wealth of knowledge and expertise, as well as a great appreciation for our very successful

Florida federal and state conservation partnership," said Herrington. "Her participation in this program will serve to further develop and hone her leadership talents."

A Service-wide, competitive development program, the SUTL program offers individuals at the GS-11 and 12 level the chance to improve their leadership skills through skill assessments, coaching, self-paced and group exercises and developmental assignments. The program includes a two-week session targeting leadership competencies and a follow-up week after a six-month interim. The course is designed to improve performance in thirteen different competencies of the Service's Leadership Competency Development Model.

Adimey was selected for Cohort 29 and will begin the first phase in December 2014. Calleson was selected for Cohort 30 beginning in February 2015.

"Terri's and Nicole's selections and participation in this outstanding program will no doubt serve the Service and our Florida team well," said Williams. "I encourage all of our team members to give serious consideration toward competing for this and other valuable leadership developmental programs."

Dr. Catherine Phillips is the New Project Leader of the Panama City Field Office

By Denise Rowell

Dr. Catherine Phillips has been named Project Leader for the Panama City Field Office. Catherine started her career with the Service in 1998 as a Career Awareness Intern before joining the Student Career Experience Program, which launched her into conservation. Prior to coming to Panama City, she worked as a research fish biologist at the San Marcos Fish Hatchery and Technology Center in Region Two. There, she supervised biologists, advised graduate and undergraduate students, and investigated genetics, ecology, behavior, life history and recovery issues.

She joined the Panama City Field Office as Deputy of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office in 2011. There, she worked on integrating the PCFO with the developing Landscape Conservation Cooperatives. Catherine also served as Acting Project Leader when her predecessor, Don Imm, accepted a new job in Athens, Ga.

Catherine considers the Florida panhandle a unique biological treasure because it hosts an incredible amount of habitat diversity within only one coastal plain, and has a wide variety of associated endemic species.

She outlined her vision for the PCFO as follows:

- To continue to work collaboratively in our transition to become a statewide conservation team while strengthening our capacity to ground our decisions in science and aim for discernible biological outcome;
- To further integrate and look for future collaboration opportunities among fisheries and ecological services and other programs in the



Cathy Phillips displays a rat snake. (Courtesy Photo)

Service (one Service approach) in order to address the growing at risk and ESA work load; and

- To transition our office to fully embrace our directive of Strategic Habitat Conservation in partnership to better prepare us to strategically address the changes we are facing on the landscape.

In an earlier e-mail, Florida State Supervisor Larry Williams congratulated Catherine on her selection, calling her an “outstanding leader.”

Roost of Elusive Florida Bonneted Bats Found In Roof Tiles of Abandoned House

By Ken Warren

A team of research volunteers, led by Dr. Kisi Bohn, of Florida International University, probably felt like yelling “Eureka!” when they discovered an active roost of endangered Florida bonneted bats living in the rooftop of an abandoned house in Coral Gables, Florida recently.

“It’s the first roost found that was an artificial structure and not a bat house, specifically placed to attract bats. This is a tremendous find and very exciting,” said Paula Halupa, biologist with the South Florida Ecological Services Office. “It is especially exciting because a grassroots volunteer effort made the find.”

Paula added, “The location of the roost is not surprising in many regards as bats can use manmade structures and since it is close to the Granada Golf Course, where the species is regularly found.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and other partners have been studying this elusive species for quite some time, and more and more is being learned about it.

“The roosts we know of at Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area are all bat houses there, specifically designed for this species,” said Paula. “We believe the only known natural roost in a tree at Avon Park Air Force Range is still active, but it’s difficult to monitor due to frequent base closures.”

The bats are likely using other natural roosts at Babcock-Webb and elsewhere in their current range, it’s just unknown exactly where. Telemetry work could help answer that question.



Florida bonneted bats have large broad ears that slant forward over their eyes, hence their name. photo: FWC

For the safety and security of the bats, researchers aren’t revealing the exact location of the roost near in Coral Gables secure until they can sort out risks and obtain access. “We want to make the owners/managers aware that these bats are using the property, find out the plans for the site and get access,” Paula said. “We’re hoping to get down there for a site visit soon.”



The Florida bonneted bat is the largest bat found in Florida. photo: FWC



Paula Halupa

“This is a tremendous find and very exciting!”

— Paula Halupa

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