



Panther Update

November 2008

Big Cat Field Stories

The Last Breath of Florida Panther 152

By Deborah Jansen, Big Cypress National Preserve

It was about two o'clock on the afternoon of *February 16, 2007*. The first image of male Florida panther 152 took our breath away as he gazed down at us from a sprawling laurel oak in Gator Hook Swamp. We didn't know who his parents were or exactly how old he was, but we estimated him to be approximately four years of age. His first collar was placed on him that day. A year later, this past February, he was recollared and observed to be in excellent condition, weighing a healthy 132 pounds. (*More FP152 photos can be seen in the 2008 March and April Panther Updates: see past issues link next page.*) Radio signals emitting from his collars over this period have allowed us to learn that he inhabited a 230-square-mile home range covering most of southern Big Cypress. Occasionally he spent time near Loop Road where we once found the remains of an alligator that he had killed and eaten.

On *October 17*, we were surprised to locate him north of his typical home range. Then concern set in when Field Assistant Annette Johnson continued to find him in the same place on the next two flights. His collar was not beeping in the mortality mode; yet we knew that it is rare for a male panther to remain in the same place for six days. We decided to check on him. So Annette, Ranger Drew Gilmour, and I were dropped off near his location by helicopter. His collar's signal appeared to fluctuate as we crawled through the dense palmetto and hardwood scrub, so at first we thought he was moving away from us. Then, as we were standing silently in the cypress at the edge of the hammock, we heard a guttural sound. We soon found FP152 lying under a palmetto thicket.



FP152 with Infected Left Front Leg by Deb Jansen



First Capture: FP152 About to Land in the Crash Bag
by Ralph Arwood

He raised his head slightly only once, but didn't even move his legs in an attempt to escape. We quietly observed as he took a few more labored breaths, about one minute apart; then silence. His death was recorded: October 22, at 2:30pm.

The observation that his left front leg had swollen to twice its normal size led to our first supposition that he had been bitten by a venomous snake. When we turned him over, however, we saw claw marks across his nose and cheeks. Snake theory abandoned, we now suspected that he had clashed with another male into whose territory he must have trespassed. We laid FP152 in a body bag and floated him through the strand as best we could to reach the helicopter landing site 400 yards away. The necropsy conducted the next day by Dr. Mark Cunningham confirmed that FP152 had died of infection from the severe bite wounds to his leg.



Comparison of Front Paws: Normal vs. Swollen by Deb Jansen

How did it happen that he died as we were standing there? Probably our presence added just enough stress to his system which was so close to death anyway. Witnessing a panther take his last breath? It was a sobering, unforgettable moment.

Kitten Dies on the Road

Dave Onorato, Associate Research Scientist with the FWC reported that a female panther, UCFP111, approximately eight months old, was killed by a vehicle on the morning of *October 24*. **Her death represents the 19th mortality this year and 7th road kill.** The collision occurred on SR29, a few miles north of Oil Well Road in northeast Naples at around six o'clock in the morning.

Biologists look at the wear on an adult panther's teeth to help determine age classification: with kittens they check eruption of baby and permanent teeth. UCFP111's adult canines were starting to erupt placing her at about eight months of age.

(Right) **This Eight Month Old Panther Kitten Still Lives. It's Lucy, (now 16 months) Taken in March at the Lowry Park Zoo, Tampa Florida** by Claude Desrochers



What Humans Are Doing

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced on *October 10* the availability of a final Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan. The response plan establishes guidelines for responding to and managing potential interactions between people and Florida panthers, and for educating the public about appropriate behavior when living and recreating in panther habitat. The Environmental Assessment addresses the conservation needs of this critically endangered animal which is mainly found south of Lake Okeechobee. The final Environmental Assessment and the Response Plan (Appendix C) can be read in entirety on:

http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/images/pdflibrary/R4FWS_Panther%20EA.final.pdf

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve is continuing its commitment to preserve Florida's endangered panther by installing panther crossing signs and implementing educational programs. For details see: http://www.dep.state.fl.us/secretary/news/2008/10/1010_01.htm

The Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge kicked off their fall Trail Guide Ambassador Training Program for the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) on *October 25*. This comprehensive training series, being conducted in partnership with The Ritz-Carlton, Naples, consists of five Saturday classes held October 25, November 8, 15, 27 and December 13. For more information see: <http://www.floridapanther.org/training101.html>

Panther Posse purchased a new \$450.00 camera and installed it on the wooded grounds of Pinewoods Elementary School on *Tuesday, October 14*. "Pennies for Panthers" is a fundraising activity through the Florida Panther Posse Program, a children's learning experience created and presented by the Florida Gulf Coast University "Wings of Hope" program. "Pennies" raises money to purchase motion cameras which help monitor Florida panthers and other wildlife. This is the seventh panther camera to be installed by Wings of Hope to help monitor the endangered Florida panther. A news article with more details can be found on: <http://www.news-press.com/article/20081013/NEWS0108/810130367/-1/NEWS0103index.html>

What You Can Do This Month

Learn More About the Panther Posse Program. Visit their website: www.fgu.edu/cas/wingsofhope.



Female Panther Using the Corkscrew Underpass *March 24, 2008*
Courtesy the Florida Panther Posse

Special Thanks To:

Layne Hamilton, [Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands NWR](#)

Mark Lotz (FWC), [Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission](#)

Deborah Jansen (BCNP), [Big Cypress National Preserve](#)

Updates Are Compiled By Roxann Hanson

Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge

c/o U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

3860 Tollgate Boulevard, Suite 300

Naples, FL 34114

<http://floridapanther.org>

Past Issues: http://floridapanther.org/news_updatesnewsletters.html **E-mail:** roxann.hanson@floridapanther.info