



Panther Update

April 2009

Big Cat Field Stories

By Deborah Jansen, BCNP Biologist
Photos by Ralph Arwood

The Big Cypress Florida Panther Capture Team worked for 29 days between *January 31* and *March 1* this year. Capture efforts are normally concentrated into this time period to coincide with low water levels, cool air temperatures, fewer hunters in the field, and the availability of a houndsman and veterinarian. Three panthers were recollared: FP161 on *January 31* (first day in the field), and both FP162 and FP133 on the same day, *February 11*. Two new males were added to the study population at the end of the month: FP169 and FP171. Neither had been handled at a den as kittens (based on the lack of a transponder chip under their skin). So the age of FP169 was estimated to be 4 to 5 years; and FP171 to be 2 to 3 years.



FP162 Trying to Avoid Recapture

FP161's Positive Pregnancy Test

The BCNP protocol for handling panthers with working collars is to dart them after the hounds are restrained (leashed to nearby trees). Then, if the panther should jump from its tree in response to the stinging dart, we can let it run off without being chased and treed again. This was the



FP161's Kittens Marked on *February 25*

scenario during FP161's recollaring on *January 31*. After she jumped and ran, we waited a few minutes, and then searched for her using telemetry gear. We found her asleep on the ground in a cool, dry mixed hardwood swamp. We believe this technique is easier on the panther than having it drop into a net, especially if a female is pregnant.

As part of the routine physical exam, the team veterinarian palpates a panther's abdomen to check the organs. Although FP161 was not obviously pregnant when seen in the tree, National Park Service veterinarian Kevin Castle felt one, possibly two kittens and estimated that their mom was in her third trimester. The high progesterone level and positive relaxin (diagnostic of fetal implantation) from her bloodwork also indicated pregnancy.

These assessments were confirmed when FP161 settled in to one location about ten days after capture. On *February 25* we found three kittens at her den: two males and one female. They are now logged in as K277, K278, and K279. Our monitoring has shown that FP161 continued visiting the den until March 28, when the kittens were six weeks old. We hope that they now are ambling behind mom, exploring their new world in Big Cypress National Preserve.

"What Just Happened to Me???"

During a panther capture, a "workup" includes (but is not limited to) the collar, vaccines, blood and tissue samples, ear tattoos, transponder chip, and an overall health evaluation. When finished with the workup, the team packs all the gear and moves it away from the site. While the sedated panther begins to recover, everyone heads back to the swamp buggy except the veterinarian and team leader who linger behind, watching from a distance until they are sure the panther is recovering safely. Panthers are basically timid and possess a keen sense of hearing. They will try to escape from any unusual sound such as the snap of a twig or human voice,

even when partially sedated and too unsteady to do so. Consequently, we've found that it is better to leave the area as soon as possible so the panther hears only familiar sounds from the woods and can sleep off the sedative peacefully.

This year, team member/photographer Ralph Arwood placed cameras at both FP161's and FP133's capture sites to record their behaviors after we left. These cameras emit no sound or flash, and will not disturb the panther.

On *January 31*, FP161 was captured in the early afternoon.



Field Cam Photo: FP161 Returning to the Site of Her Capture

Photos revealed that she got up and walked off at 4:15 pm, about three hours after we left. End of story? No. Surprisingly, she returned near dawn the next morning, sniffed around the area where she had been lying, then walked off. We initially considered this to be unique behavior, until we studied photos from FP133's *February 11* capture site. At about six in the evening he was left to recover. Almost two hours later, he got up and moved off. At almost three the next morning, he too returned to within view of the cameras, spent five minutes sniffing around where he had been lying, then walked away!

Student Discovers Road-Killed Panther

Around 10:20 pm on *Wednesday, March 25*, a Florida Gulf Coast University student discovered and reported a panther carcass on Treeline Avenue near Southwest Florida International Airport in Lee County, Florida. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recovered the road-killed panther shortly after that at 11:00 pm. UCFP118 was an uncollared male, approximately 1.5 years old, without a transponder chip. Time of death was estimated to be shortly before the panther was found. **This is the 4th road mortality and 5th total mortality for 2009.** For an *NBC2 News* article and video interview of panther biologist, Mark Lotz about this death entitled, "Panther Killed on Treeline Avenue", click on:

<http://www.nbc-2.com/Articles/readarticle.asp?articleid=27507&z=14>

What Humans are Doing

Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge Save the Panther Week, March 2009: a Rousing Success! Special Thanks to All Volunteers and Partners who Made This Event Possible!!! Ecological Services Division of US FWS, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Friends of Florida Panther Refuge, City of Marco Island, Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, Friends of Big Cypress National Preserve, The Conservancy of SW Florida, FGCU, Wings of Hope, Panther Posse, CREW Land and Water Trust, Defenders of Wildlife, Florida Wildlife Federation, Picayune Strand State Forest, Save the Manatee Club

- **Read This *March 20* Public News Service Article Entitled: "Save the Panther Day:" A Prowl through Panther Country:** <http://www.publicnewsservice.org/index.php?content/article/8365-1>
- **See the 2009 Save the Panther Day Proclamation Issued by Governor Charlie Christ:** http://myfwc.com/panther/news/pdf/Crist_Proclamation_09.pdf

Panther Prowl Poker Run! Sun, April 19: registration is 10-11am at Harley-Davidson of Naples. Fun run will travel through panther habitat to 5 locations and end with a free pig roast for participants. Benefits FFPNWR. Click on *April 19* for details: http://www.floridapanther.org/refuge_calendar.html (For more information contact Lisa at 239-352-4449.)

FWC Issues Corrective Press Release on April 06. An inaccurate story was printed April 5th and 6th by the Key West Citizen and the Associated Press respectively concerning the current status of the Florida panther program. For the facts see: http://www.myfwc.com/NEWSROOM/09/statewide/News_09_X_PantherTracking.htm . And for an NBC 2 News clip with video see: <http://www.nbc-2.com/articles/readarticle.asp?articleid=27945&z=3>

What You Can Do This Month

Looking For Ways to Save Money and Help Protect the Environment? Learn about Florida-friendly landscaping and start cutting the high costs of herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers, water, and maintenance equipment. Environmental protection for the Florida Panther begins in your yard. Pick up some landscaping tips and see examples of landscape designs. Start making small changes today! <http://www.floridayards.org/index.php>

Special Thanks To.....

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

Deborah Jansen and Ralph Arwood, [Big Cypress National Preserve](#)

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

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