



Panther Update

January 2009

Big Cat Field Stories

Florida Panther Don Juan: New Kid in Town

On the morning of *December 8*, Susan Lowe, Wildlife Care Supervisor, observed legendary Florida panther, Don Juan, explore his new exhibit area at Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park (The only Florida state park that exhibits captive wildlife). The session lasted for about fifteen minutes on his first day there. True to his moniker (earned by having sired approximately 30 kittens in the wild), the panther began vocalizing immediately when he emerged from his day pen as if calling out to the female Western cougar, Maygar, who lounged in her den nearby. He moved to the center of the exhibit, paused, and then circled around to check out the fenced perimeter. Don Juan, known as FP79 to biologists, pawed at the chain links a few times and then moved on. Finally, he began to show signs of uneasiness and made his way back into his day pen to sun himself on a platform.



Above: Don Juan Tests the Limits of the Chain Link Fence
By Susan Lowe

Left: Maygar, Don Juan's Probable New Love Interest
By Claude Desrochers



FP79 aka Don Juan Explores His New Surroundings
Courtesy Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park

In February of 2006, Don Juan was removed to captivity at Busch Gardens Amusement Park in Tampa after repeated depredations in Big Cypress National Preserve and Copeland, Florida. He had been living at Busch Gardens since that time, in a very small enclosure, not visible to the public. He was essentially waiting for the construction of his planned large exhibit of natural habitat, which because of funding difficulties, did not materialize. In spite of the cramped living quarters, Don Juan had become well adjusted to his new lifestyle at Busch Gardens. Mark Cunningham, FWC Veterinarian assisting with the transition, examined FP79 and concluded, "He's doing well in captivity, good weight, very healthy and has settled in good general condition." The recent death of Homosassa Springs' 23-year-old Western cougar, Sheena, had now afforded an opportunity to move Don Juan into a larger, more suitable setting where he could be observed by the public.

Susan Lowe, who is facilitating his acclimation, explains, "Don Juan is being introduced to his exhibit area in short periods: a slow transition so he is happy and comfortable. It's a good 100 feet from the boardwalk viewing area but he can be seen on his perch. It is a nice open area and there is cover, with boulders in the center and a low platform. He has a night house and day pen and platforms where he can rest. The area has no top and lots of trees - banded for security." Also, for security he will wear the collar for at least six months.

Susan adds that Don Juan (age 11) and Maygar (age 9) are well aware of each other and seem to enjoy the exposure. They take turns using the exhibit habitat so are never in direct contact. Each cat dines daily on about two pounds of "meat mix": ground premium horsemeat mixed with commercial cat food which has been soaked until soft. "Of course the cats do find extra nutrition", adds Ms. Lowe, "...when the unsuspecting squirrel or bird wanders into their habitat area. These pumas are surprisingly fast and once they catch their prey will drag it around and show it off."

Susan extends to everyone a warm welcome to come visit Don Juan and his friends at Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, Homosassa Springs, FL.

<http://www.homosassasprings.org/Homosassa.cfm>

FP137 Visits the Vet Clinic

Florida Panther 137 was recaptured at Okaloacoochee Slough (OK Slough) on *December 12* by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Capture Team. He was initially captured in January of 2005 but his GPS collar subsequently failed prematurely. Discovering his tracks on the ground led to an opportunity for the FWC Team to fit FP137 with a new collar so they could continue gathering data on this 6.5-year-old healthy male panther. Unfortunately, FP137 tried to escape after being darted during capture and received two lacerations to the scrotum. Not wanting to take any chances with infection, the team quickly transported FP137 to a nearby veterinary clinic where conditions were sterile and the wounds could be cleansed and stitched. He was released back into the wild shortly after sunset that day and began normal movements by noon the following day. Continued monitoring indicates that FP137 remains unaffected by his injuries.



Having Left his Pursuers Below, FP137 Rests on an Oak Branch 25 Feet from the Ground By Mark Lotz (FWC)

What Humans are Doing

On *December 17th* the Third Revision was approved and the **US Fish and Wildlife Service released a new recovery plan for the endangered Florida Panther**. The plan calls for building new populations outside the endangered cat's South Florida stronghold for the future, while concurrently working to strengthen the existing South Florida population. For Details and a Q and A go to: <http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/index.cfm?method=activityhighlights&id=14>

On *December 22nd* the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released the 2008 Interagency Florida Panther Response Team Report** which summarizes human-panther interactions investigated by the Interagency Florida Panther Response Team over the past year. See: <http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/index.cfm?method=activityhighlights&id=9>

FWC's Mark Lotz posted a new **Field Note** in *December* on <http://myfwc.com/panther/news/pdf/FieldNoteOctNov2008.pdf>

What You Can Do This Month



Visit For Footed Friends, a natural pet food store in Naples, FL. The Friends of the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge will be featured each day there in January and, on the evening of January 20th, the Friends will present a free lecture on Florida panthers. On January 31st Friends members, accompanied by Ranger the taxidermic panther, will be available to greet visitors and answer questions. For more information see: <http://www.floridapanther.org/calendar.html>

Attend the Friends of the Florida Panther NWR Annual Meeting held Thursday, January 29 at the Norris Center in downtown Naples. Speakers are Captain Frank Adams, a local historian and Larry Richardson, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge biologist. Save the date. Details coming soon on: Events@floridapanther.org.

Special Thanks To:

Layne Hamilton, [Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands NWR](#)
Mark Lotz (FWC), [Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission](#)
Susan Lowe, [Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park](#)

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