



Panther Update

July 2009

Big Cat Field Stories

Catfights: Females and Intraspecific Aggression

On June 12, during a routine morning telemetry flight, FWC panther biologist Mark Lotz received a mortality signal from FP140, a seven-year-old female panther located on the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. At the scene, two sets of tell-tale dual punctures in her skull were evident and the carcass was already picked clean, though she died only days earlier. The cause of death, determined to be intraspecific aggression (ISA), would be verified once FP140 was transported to Gainesville for a necropsy.

Most panther conflicts are between males, fighting over females and home ranges. Since the first Florida panther was captured in February of 1981, 46 occurrences of intraspecific aggression have been reported (as of June 2008). Of those cases roughly 33% were female deaths. When asked how females find themselves in a skirmish, Mark Lotz gave the following discourse. "A female being killed by males has been documented in all cougar populations so it's not anything unique. Although it does happen less frequently than with males, female deaths from ISA could be the result of protecting kittens, a kill, or both. There is also another theory out there that if the resident male is usurped, the new male may not be familiar with the resident females and may view them as rivals instead of mates and kill them. Another theory speculates that it's a simple miscue while mating and an unfortunate circumstance of having sharp claws and teeth. Without having males collared in the location where FP140 was killed, we can't really speculate. But given the fact she had been in that spot for about a week before I saw her indicates she had a kill there. She also had a kitten with her who was old enough to survive on its own. My money is on the protecting kittens and/or kill theory.

We've had several other females die in fights before too. FP113's mom, FP78, was killed leaving her too young to survive on her own. She was raised in captivity, released, and is doing fine now. FP67 is another. Her daughter was FP116. Her death happened about the same time as FP78. That may have been "an unfamiliar male" thing going on there. The timing and location was close enough that the same male could have been responsible. He was uncollared so we can't verify it. Turns out in FP116's case that death by male was 'hereditary'; she suffered the same fate as her mother after producing a few litters. There have been a few others over the years. In one case, the female FP49 was being cannibalized by the male. I walked in to retrieve FP49 and saw another panther leave her side. At first I thought it might have been a kitten. Turns out it was an adult male. Yes, it has been documented; panthers do kill and eat one another on occasion."



Though He Did Not Cause FP140's Death, FP133 Displays His ISA Battle Scars of Tattered Ears and Nose Photo by Ralph Arwood

A Visit with "DJ" in Homosassa Springs

Last December, FP79 aka "Don Juan" aka "DJ", a Florida panther living in captivity (see January Update http://www.floridapanther.org/update_0109.pdf), was moved from Busch Gardens Amusement Park in Tampa to Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park (HSWSP). Initially, he was a little hesitant about coming out into his exhibit. But the spring issue of the HSWSP Friends newsletter recently reported that, "Don Juan is adjusting to his new life here at the Park. After a successful period of quarantine and a few months of introduction to the sights, sounds and smells of the Park, Don Juan was lured out into his exhibit with a 'fishsicle' (a block of ice with fish in it). He is spending more time out on his exhibit area stalking his wildlife neighbors, lounging in the sunshine, and generally looking smug. He and Maygar, our Western Cougar, take turns out in the exhibit. Typically, Maygar is out in the morning and Don Juan is out in the afternoon."



"DJ" Cooling Off with a Fishsicle by Phyllis Konitshek

Deb Tribbey, volunteer with the Florida DEP, HSWSP, and member of the Friends of HSWSP, recently forwarded a photograph and reported on Don Juan's progress. "I thought you all might enjoy seeing how the 'big boy' is doing at Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park. He's now out in the panther habitat half-days and seems to have gotten used to the people on the

boardwalk watching him. What he likes to do is stalk the bobcats next door, or an unlucky squirrel or bird in his habitat. He's a healthy and happy old guy, and inspires those of us who interact with the public doing wildlife interpretation to educate everyone about endangered Florida Panthers."

Criminal Act Against a Florida Panther Being Investigated

In early *June*, information was released on the shooting death of a two-year-old female Florida panther, whose carcass was discovered *April 21, 2009*. The news was delayed because the incident was and still is under investigation. The panther UCFP120 was found near the Hendry Correctional Institute on private property bordering the Big Cypress National Preserve, in Hendry County, Florida.



UCFP120, Killed by Gunshot Wound *Courtesy FWC*

She was believed to have been shot within a week prior to the discovery of her remains. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) special agents and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) investigators are jointly investigating the case. **A reward of up to \$16,200 is being offered** by a diverse group of organizations for information that leads to an arrest and/or a conviction in the shooting death of this Florida panther. For more information see: http://myfwc.com/NEWSROOM/09/south/News_09_S_PantherReward_USFWS.htm

Kitten Search: A Field Note

By Deborah Jansen, Biologist, Big Cypress National Preserve

We've been monitoring a den of FP153 for the past two plus weeks and went in *June 24* to search for the kittens. This panther mom chose a very difficult site to access: a large hammock in a location requiring a six-mile off-road vehicle ride in from Turner River Road. So, when she left the den, we decided to fly in by helicopter. Upon arrival we found that the understory of the hammock was solid fern with many, many possible hiding places for a kitten den. Four of us searched for nearly two hours and found trails, bear scat, but no kittens. A time limit with the helicopter forced us to finally let go of the search. Her movements over the next few days and our next location flight indicated she moved the kittens within the hammock, so we must have been close. Our watch began anew. It is too large a hammock to get close enough to her to get a better location without forcing her to move them again. We may give it one more try.

What Humans are Doing

On June 3, the Collier County Transportation Planning Department hosted a public meeting to discuss putting a new interchange on Interstate 75 between Collier Boulevard and SR 29. Residents of Golden Gate Estates, visitors, business and property owners reviewed the project displays and talked with Transportation Services Division staff. Most Florida panther advocates are concerned about this proposed interchange because it would facilitate further development in panther habitat. For details see: <http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2009/jun/28/proposed-new-interchange-alligator-alley-goes-agai/>

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) invites everyone to attend a public workshop about proposed wildlife crossings on U.S. 41 near Turner River Road in Collier County on July 30. FDOT presently has an environmental and engineering study underway to evaluate options for construction of wildlife crossings and fencing along U.S. 41 from Bass Lake Road to Turner River Road within Big Cypress National Preserve. Defenders of Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have applied for and received state transportation enhancement funds to develop wildlife crossing concepts and address public involvement issues for this area. Display boards with alternatives will be available for the public to review, and FDOT representatives will be present to discuss the study.

What You Can Do This Month

TURNER RIVER WILDLIFE CROSSINGS WORKSHOP: SAVE THE DATE! PLEASE ATTEND! Six Florida Panthers have been Struck by Vehicles on this Project Site in the last Five Years. Please come, learn, and show your support.

5:30-7:30 pm, Thursday, July 30
Everglades City Community Center
205 Buckner Avenue
Everglades City, Florida

Special Thanks To.....

Layne Hamilton, [Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge](#)
Mark Lotz, [Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission](#)
Deborah Jansen and Ralph Arwood, [Big Cypress National Preserve](#)

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