



Panther Update

March 2009

Big Cat Field Stories

February Marks the End of Capture Season for FWC and BCNP

It was a productive and safe capture month for both agencies: the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP). This month's issue is dedicated to the activities of the FWC, and "stay tuned" for next month's issue which will feature stories and photos from BCNP's capture efforts. In addition to the new captures listed on the table below, the FWC reported that two panthers were treed and not collared last month due to safety concerns. BCNP also recollared three panthers and handled three kittens, 16 days of age, at the den of FP161 in *February*.

February 2009 New Panther Captures				
Date	Panther ID	Sex	Age	Location
6	FP167	M	2.5	Seminole Indian Reservation
9	FP168	F	7	Lee County Port Authority Mitigation Land
25	FP169	M	4.5	Big Cypress National Preserve
26	FP170	F	3	Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park
27	FP171	M	2.5	Big Cypress National Preserve

Panther Injured on the Road within Days of Capture.

While scouting for tracks at Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation on *January 31*, panther researcher Dave Onorato and visiting veterinarian Emmett Blankenship heard mating pair vocalizations. (Panther tracks in the area indicated that the couple had already been together for at least four days: ample time for productive copulation). Roy McBride was called to the location and with the help of his trained hounds quickly had both cats treed. The capture team headed for the female first because she was closer and lower to ground. However, as more easily happens when panthers are treed low, she jumped and escaped upon their approach. Most of the dogs were with the male, so as a passing storm front began to release its rains, the team advanced on the soon to be FP166. He came down from a small oak shortly after being darted. "We almost had a



Silhouette of FP166 Seeking Safety from the Hounds in a Small Oak Tree. Photo Courtesy FWC

double", stated panther biologist Mark Lotz. "We've collared doubles before, so this isn't a first but it is rare." What is also quite rare is what happened next. Less than two weeks after capture, on *February 9*, FP166 was struck by vehicle at about eleven p.m. on CR833 just north of the Seminole Reservation boundary. He survived the collision but quickly disappeared into the woods. The driver acted responsibly and immediately notified FWC officials. Because the collar was in place, panther experts were able to monitor the cat's positions and condition; ready to bring him out of the wild for treatment if necessary. FP166 was observed four times by biologists (who also took and studied videos) mulling around within a large hammock area before he returned to regular movement patterns and was deemed able to recover on his own. This event illustrates one way in which radio collars can help save a panther's life and reminds us that unrecordable numbers of uncollared panthers die from vehicle collisions, after-the-fact, in remote locations.



Left: A Sleeping FP166, with a Vehicle Collision in his Future. Right: Newly Collared FP170. Courtesy FWC.



The Bouncing Panther by Mark Lotz

It happened with FP167, a male, two-and-a-half year old panther that we had treed and darted at Seminole Indian Reservation on *February 6*. He had climbed to about thirty-

five feet before being darted, falling out of the tree, hitting the crash bag, and bouncing a good four feet in the air. His hind end was as high as my shoulder and the rest of him rose upward from that point. I've never seen one bounce like that. It was remarkable. Sometimes they bounce a foot or so but usually the bag engulfs them immediately.



Drugs and the Net Put an End to FP167's Gymnastics. Note the Cat Hound (right lower corner) Being Allowed a Light Sniff as a Reward for a Job Well Done. Courtesy FWC.

This panther started his fall hanging from a tree branch only by the toenails of his front paws, clinging to the branch and hanging vertically for about a minute before finally letting go. He landed in the bag after what seemed like a four or five second drop. That might not seem like much but count it out; it's a long time to fall. When he hit the bag, he bounced up in a comical pose, hung in mid air for about a second and (I swear) looked around before landing. We kept watch on him for a few days afterward to make sure he "bounced back" with no capture-related trauma after this stunt. Since they must be respected as potentially dangerous carnivores, panthers only get names on rare occasions. But I've unofficially dubbed him "Tigger". Tiggers are wonderful things; they're bouncy, trouncy, flouncy, pouncy.....

Male Panther Killed by Another Male FWC's Dave Onorato reported that the remains of a three to four-year-old male panther (UCFP117) were collected in the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation Billie Swamp Safari Pen on *February 2*. The animal had been dead for three to four days and was discovered by an employee of Billie Swamp Safari on *February 1*. The pattern of wounds evident on the carcass was consistent with intraspecific aggression. This is the fourth panther mortality of 2009; with the other three having resulted from vehicle collision.

What Humans are Doing

Proceedings from the 9th Mountain Lion Workshop held in Idaho last May are now available. Regarding Florida panthers there were papers authored by (among others) Dave Onorato, Chris Belden, Melody Roelke, Mark Cunningham, Darrell Land, Mark Lotz, Roy McBride, David Shindle, Deborah Jansen, and Oron Bass. Copies can be obtained for a fee for non-participants of \$15. Contact David Smith: dsmith@idfg.idaho.gov

Visitors to Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary witness panther stalking deer on February 13. See story and photos on: <http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2009/feb/20/visitors-corkscrew-swamp-sanctuary-witness-panther>

What You Can Do This Month

Participate in The 2009 Florida Panther Week Events, March 14 – 21: A week of activities for the community includes five major events, swamp walks, bike rides, slide shows, and fun! Florida Panther Refuge's Open House is the highlight as we share the unique resources of the refuge with the public! For details got to: http://www.fws.gov/floridapanther/panther_week.html

Don't Miss Saturday, March 21 "Save the Panther Day" Panther Refuge Open House 8AM - Noon

Share a fun day with your family, while exploring the Panther Refuge by swamp buggy or by walking trails. Learn about birds, plants and orchids, and of course, look for the wild panther! Learn more about what YOU can do as an individual to help save the panther and its habitat. We offer tours, educational information, and fun kids activities! **RSVP Starting March 9 - 20** Space is limited. Sign up by calling 239-353-8442 x 239 or email: events@floridapanther.org.

Special Thanks To.....

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

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

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

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