



Florida Panther Update

November 2009

Field Stories

Ironically, during October when we celebrate Halloween, a spoof on death, five recorded fatalities were stark reality for the panther population of south Florida. More sobering, November immediately started out with another kitten road-kill on the first day of the month. This brings the 2009 total verified panther deaths in the wild to 19, with 12 of those being caused by vehicles. Details can be found in the table below. See <http://www.floridapanther.net.org/index.php/pulse/> for a complete table of 2009 panther mortalities.

Florida Panther Mortalities
October 5th through November 1st, 2009

Date	Identification	Sex	Age	Location	Cause
10/05	FP166	M	5-6	Seminole Indian Reservation	Intraspecific Aggression
10/7	UCFP127	F	3-4	Turner River, 0.3 mi S US41	Blunt Force Trauma (unknown origin)
N/A	UCFP128	N/A	N/A	N/A	Under Investigation
10/19	UCFP129	M	3-4 MOS.	CR 846 2 miles E of Immokalee	Vehicle
10/21	UCFP130	F	3-4	CR 846 2 miles E of Immokalee	Vehicle
11/1	UCFP131	F	3-4 MOS.	CR 833 N boundary of BCSIR	Vehicle

Two Panther Mothers: One Lives and One Dies in Kitten Road Accidents.

On *October 19th*, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) received a call reporting a dead panther kitten on County Road 846, approximately two miles east of Immokalee. A three to four-month-old male kitten (UCFP129), weighing 21 pounds, was retrieved and transported to Gainesville for necropsy. Two days later on the *21st*, FWC received another call that an adult panther was killed at the same location as the kitten. This time a three to four-year-old adult female, UCFP130 was retrieved. She was suspected to be the mother of UCFP129. DNA analysis from tissue cultures taken during the necropsies will verify the mother/kitten relationship but it is a likely scenario given that typical maternal behavior for a female panther with a missing kitten is to wander around searching for it.

Less than two weeks later, on *November 1st*, another three to



Above: Road-Killed UCFP129 Being Prepared for Transport
Below: UCFP130, Likely His Mom: Hide Marred by Vultures
 Photos Courtesy Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



four-month-old female panther kitten (UCFP131) died on the road. However, this time there was a much improved outcome for the mom. It was on Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation and the uncollared mother panther was being observed roaming the area by Seminole officials. After arriving at the scene, FWC's Darrell Land consulted with fellow panther team members Mark Lotz and Roy McBride about moving the kitten away from the road to where the mother panther could find it. They agreed that the mother would continue to look for her kitten and they preferred to have her find the kitten a safe distance from the highway. Shortly after sunset, Darrell heard the mother panther near the highway calling to her kitten and he stopped the cat from crossing the road. He then proceeded to move the kitten off to a side road where he had seen the mother just minutes before. FWC Law Enforcement officers also stayed on the scene for several hours after sunset, blue lights flashing to slow down traffic in the area. They observed the mother panther sitting next to the kitten's body for approximately thirty minutes before she moved away. The kitten's remains were removed from the scene the next morning and the officers monitored the area for one more night.

"Everything worked out in our favor in this case", commented Mark Lotz. "All the panther mom understands is that her kitten stopped following, so she will go looking for it. If we remove the kitten before the mother has discovered why it is no longer following her, she will keep searching, endangering herself by hanging out on or crossing the road multiple times trying to find it. That's what inspired us to leave this dead kitten for a while. We had all the information we needed to make it work. This wasn't the case with UCFP129 and 130. No trails, no tracks, no knowledge of which side of road she was on or which direction they came from: a completely different situation. So this practice can't always be applied. But when circumstances come together favorably, it's a good technique."

Adult Panther Pulled from Turner River: How Did She Die?

by Deborah Jansen, Wildlife Biologist, Big Cypress National Preserve

On October 9th, I received an unusual phone call: a report that a dead panther was floating in Turner River, a narrow waterway situated within Big Cypress National Preserve near the town of Ochopee. The report came from a local kayaking guide who was familiar with the area wildlife, so Big Cypress Ranger Wynn Carney and I quickly responded. The current easily took us by canoe to the reported area about a half mile south of the bridge on Highway 41. We smelled UCFP127 before seeing her in some emergent vegetation at the river's edge. Following protocol for panther deaths of unknown cause, Ranger Carney took over the investigation, inspecting the area for human sign. As we stood in waist-deep water, photographing the scene, we saw no alligators that would have suggested one may have grabbed the panther. As we inspected the carcass, we found bare spots where the hair was sloughed off or perhaps eaten off by small aquatic critters; but nothing suggesting why she died.

Mark Cunningham, DVM, conducted the necropsy a week later and found that this 3 to 4-year-old female panther's stomach had ruptured, likely due to an impact to her left side as indicated by extensive bruising. He thought she might have lived from a few hours to a few days in that condition.



UCFP127 Photo Courtesy Big Cypress National Preserve

The cause of death was categorized as due to "blunt trauma" and one FWC panther expert theorized that it may have happened when the cat jumped from a tree or was taking down prey. Others wonder if this may be the 9th known panther to be struck by a vehicle on Hwy. 41 at Turner River where the vegetation provides a desirable corridor for panther movement. Efforts are ongoing to reduce threats to panthers at this site, including slowing traffic and educating drivers, while work is underway to find and implement more effective long-term solutions.

What People are Doing

September 20-27 - Big Cypress Swamp Welcome Center Held an Open House with screenings of a new Welcome Center film about the Big Cypress entitled "Big Cypress Swamp: The Western Everglades," which includes discussion of the Florida panther. For a preview and details see <http://www.bigcypressswamp.org/bcs/video.html>

October 6 - NBC2 News Online ran a story about FGCU's "Pennies for Panthers" Program -Students saving pennies to help track panthers (with video). <http://www.nbc-2.com/Global/story.asp?S=11268903>

October 15 - A report was released entitled "Technical Review of the Florida Panther Protection Program Proposed for the Rural Lands Stewardship Area of Collier County, Florida" by The Florida Panther Protection Program Technical Review Team. It was prepared for rural landowners and conservation organizations as parties to a Memorandum of Understanding dated June 2, 2008 by the Florida Panther Protection Plan Coalition. To view the complete report click on:

http://media.naplesnews.com/media/static/Panther_Review_Report.pdf. For a news article on the subject see:
<http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2009/oct/28/scientists-recommend-improvements-panther-plan/>

October 28 - News story released, "Cabbage Palms Threaten Panthers at Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge; Stimulus Funds Will Be Used to Eliminate Them." <http://www.cape-coral-daily-breeze.com/page/content.detail/id/511720.html?nav=5011>

What You Can Do

HELP YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY RENEW THEIR COMMITMENT TO DRIVE VEHICLES THOUGHTFULLY THROUGH WILDLIFE HABITAT.

Visit Defenders of Wildlife's WOW (Watch Out for Wildlife) webpage for driver tips, a slideshow and other helpful information.

http://www.defenders.org/programs_and_policy/habitat_conservation/habitat_and_highways/take_action/watch_out_for_wildlife/index.php



Florida Panther Update Partners

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR) <http://www.fws.gov/floridapanther/>

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) <http://www.floridapanthernet.org/>

Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) <http://www.nps.gov/bicy/index.htm>

FGCU "Wings of Hope" Florida Panther Posse <http://www.fgcu.edu/CAS/WingsofHope/index.html>

Defenders of Wildlife <http://www.defenders.org/index.php>

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