



# Florida Panther *Update*

March 2011

## Field Stories

### Handling FP175's Kittens: a Volunteer's Perspective

Story by **Roxann Hanson, FPNWR Volunteer**

Photos by **Ralph Arwood, Volunteer In Parks, BCNP**

Based on four years of experience assisting with Florida panther outreach efforts, I would wholeheartedly recommend volunteer work for wildlife/habitat conservation to anyone. The rewards in terms of personal growth, friendships, and sense of accomplishment are invaluable. Plus sometimes, when you least expect it, there can be the most inspiring moments. I would like to share a few of those with you in the story which follows.

The surprise phone call came in the early afternoon of January 27, 2011. The Big Cypress National Preserve panther research team had located FP175's den on the Bear Island Unit, north of I75 and I was invited to observe a kitten work-up as a thank you for volunteering! Our starting point was a rest stop off the freeway, where we organized and donned our gear. I excitedly strapped on a backpack containing some equipment used by the team which on that day included National Park Service biologists Deborah Jansen, John Kellam, and volunteer/photographer Ralph Arwood.

Once Deborah located the den (about one mile in), I was allowed to wade through dense saw palmettos and then crawl between woody shrub stems to ultimately peer in at the cool and shadowy, hollowed-out space. Ralph, a retired physician, was crouched inside facing the two kittens and photographing them in their natural state. He then handed to me about five pound's worth of wiggling fur, with a reminder to protect the kitten's face as I held it close while fighting my way back out through thick vegetation.

Deborah organized us into teams for the kitten work-up. I was to assist John. Clean towels were arranged on the grass. The four of us knelt around the towels with bio-sampling and veterinarian supplies scattered at our sides. I gently set the kitten down and nervously donned the required rubber gloves. By the end of the work-up those gloves were in shreds from the already sharp claws of this three-week-old male kitten, now officially recorded as K319. At this early age, K319 was exhibiting his wildness and his fighting survival instincts by hissing and soft growling with claws extended. At times he would attempt a charmingly "fierce" swipe with his little paw. His smell was gamey and his fur downy; very fine, in splotches of tawny and black, fading to a grayish color around the paws.

John began the work-up with a weighing, sexing, a general health check, and by feeling along the kitten's tail for kinks. Then he searched for whorls. Next K319's hide above the shoulders was swabbed twice with alcohol, then with an antimicrobial. A transponder chip was inserted under the skin. To my relief, the cub showed no reaction to this needle stab. He also tolerated well having his little belly shaved, some fur pulled out, and pinhead-sized skin samples punched out of his ears.

The most enjoyable task for me (and probably K319 as well) was feeding him the deworming medicine with a small plastic syringe containing a thick mustard-yellow liquid. Very gradually, I pressed the fluid into the side of K319's mouth. A small amount. I waited for him to chomp and lick before pressing again.



*Panther Kitten Siblings K319 and K320 in BCNP's Bear Island Unit*

With the work-up completed, the siblings were set down together upon the trampled grass. They quieted and their heads turned in perfect unison, blue eyes tracking Ralph's movements back and forth across the site as the team cleared the area of any sign of human presence. I positioned myself to block the piercing rays of the late-afternoon sun and guarded FP175's kittens while they relaxed in the shade waiting to be returned to their den. I wanted to freeze time and hold on to this moment forever.

See <http://floridapantherupdate.blogspot.com/2011/03/handling-fp175s-kittens-volunteers.html> For the Complete Story

My hope is that this story inspires you to lend a hand with preservation of the natural world by doing volunteer work. The possibilities are endless and the rewards, well, may surprise you. Here are a few resources to help get you started:

#### **Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP)**

<http://www.nps.gov/bicy/supportyourpark/volunteer.htm>

#### **Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge**

<http://www.floridapanther.org/volunteer.html>

#### **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)**

[http://myfwc.com/GETINVOLVED/GetInvolved\\_Volunteer.htm](http://myfwc.com/GETINVOLVED/GetInvolved_Volunteer.htm)

#### **Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR)**

Email Sandy Mickey, Park Ranger: [sandra\\_mickey@fws.gov](mailto:sandra_mickey@fws.gov)



*Roxann Hanson with Deborah Jansen and FP175's Kittens*

### 2011 Panther Capture Season Ends for FWC

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) panther team officially ended their 2011 season on February 25. Eight panthers in total were collared, including five males and three females. Two of the panthers were recollars. The Big Cypress National Preserve team completed their capture activities on March 4. Information on BCNP's efforts will follow in the April issue.

#### FWC 2010-2011 Capture Summary

*Table provided by Mark Lotz, FWC Panther Biologist*

ID	Date	Sex	Age	Location
FP183	11/3/10	M	4	Florida Panther NWR
FP184	11/8/10	F	3-4	BCNP Addition Lands
FP163	11/10/10	M	3	BCNP Addition Lands
FP185	1/15/10	F	1.5-2	Private Ranch Land
FP186	1/10/11	M	7-mo	CREW – Flint Pen Strand
FP188	2/8/11	F	2.5-3	Lee County Port Authority Mitigation Property
FP189	2/14/11	M	2.5-3	Private Ranch Land
FP177	2/21/11	M	4	BCNP Bear Island Unit

### House Cat Survives Panther Encounter in East Naples

In early February a Naples house cat was attacked by a Florida panther. FWC's Dave Onorato investigated and confirmed the presence of a panther in the area. This confirmation was unique in that he actually came face-to-face with the panther. Dr. Onorato had been searching for the house cat and spotted the panther hunkered down in a fern bed. This incident illustrates two important reasons for owners to keep cats indoors. Panthers and other wildlife pose a threat to house cats. And, conversely house cats pose a threat to Florida panthers by exposing them to diseases such as feline leukemia. This disease has the potential to wipe out the entire remaining endangered population of up to 160 panthers. The wounded house cat eventually returned home and its owner took it to a veterinarian for treatment. The FWC also ordered a FeLV test which was fortunately negative. Details of the story can be found in the following article by Renee Wilson:

<http://www.examiner.com/nature-in-ft-myers/house-cat-survives-encounter-with-florida-panther-east-naples>



*Four-Year-Old Male FP183 Gets a GPS Collar after His Capture on the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.  
Photo Provided by FWC*

## Notices and Links

**Celebrate "Save the Florida Panther Day"** at the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge Open House. Saturday, March 19, 2011. 7:30am – 1:00pm. <http://www.fws.gov/floridapanther/pdfs/2011openhouse.pdf>

You can help the National Wildlife Federation **support the expansion of the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.** <https://online.nwf.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=1381>

Dr. Dave Onorato, Associate Research Scientist, Florida Panther Project for the FWC **will give a talk on Florida Panther Kittens**, Tuesday, April 12, 7:30 pm at the Conservancy of Southwest Florida. <http://www.collieraudubon.info/programs.html>

**Florida Panther Update Partnership** This newsletter is made possible through the efforts of the following agencies:

**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)** [www.floridapanther.net](http://www.floridapanther.net)

**Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP)** [www.nps.gov/bicy](http://www.nps.gov/bicy)

**Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR)** [www.fws.gov/floridapanther](http://www.fws.gov/floridapanther)



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