



# Florida Panther *Update*

March 2012

## Field Stories

### Animals Make us Human

*By Rebecca Rising, Yosemite National Park biologist on volunteer assignment to Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP)*

I first learned about Florida Panther 194 on the day I met Big Cypress National Preserve biologist Deborah Jansen in mid-December. I was there to talk to her about volunteering, and she had just returned from the field, sporting muddy boots and wet pants. She seemed very happy having just checked up on FP194. This was the young male who was recently released into Big Cypress after being raised in captivity. Deb had been concerned because this panther had stayed in the same place for four days. That day, instead of a dead panther, she found a dead deer: a sign that FP194 was alive and well and succeeding as a wild animal.

A month later, FP194 stayed in the same place for seven days, so we went to investigate. To get to FP194's last known location, Deb, park ranger Gary Shreffler, and I travelled by swamp buggy more than an hour into Big Cypress. We could only get to within a quarter mile of the panther, and walked the remaining distance. Deb used radio telemetry to search for him, and as we approached, it became clear that FP194 was moving away. At least now we were confident he was alive. Shortly thereafter, we found him under a palmetto, his head badly wounded. It was a telling sign that he had been attacked by another male panther.

Despite the severe injuries, euthanasia was never considered as an option; we were there to save his life. Florida Panthers are so rare that every individual is a critically important member of the population. This particular panther was significant because many people had participated in his progress ever since he was orphaned, rehabilitated, and then returned to Big Cypress.

FWC Veterinarian Mark Cunningham and BCNP biologist John Kellam were called in to help and while Deb and Gary went to meet them, I sat on a cypress knee and watched the bushes to keep track of the severely distressed cat. The swamp at first seemed very quiet, but then I became more aware of our surroundings. FP194 was hidden in a patch of palmetto and cabbage palm. Behind that was pineland, where the wind swished through the needles. The croaking sound of an egret came from the cypress dome behind me. These ecological communities repeated in a mosaic for miles around me and I considered how this panther would have roamed many of these miles over the past months. I like to think he appreciated the beauty of his home, and relished his freedom in it. We know that during his roaming he found deer, and killed and ate them. We can assume he passed through the same places where we found the tracks of two other panthers, a male and a female, on our way in. We will never know the details of his fight with the other panther, but we saw the injuries that panther gave him.

When Mark and John arrived, Mark rushed to the panther to assess his condition, returning with a sobering, "He's not long for this world." Everything Mark did from that point, however, gave the panther the best possible chance of surviving. He tranquilized FP194 and laid him on the best clean surface we had: a body bag. Seeing his emaciation and the severity of his wounds silenced us for moment, but Mark got to work administering fluids and antibiotics and taking blood samples. My task was to take photos of all of his wounds. The top of his head seemed the worst. The area was covered with multiple lacerations, some very severe.



*Above: Trail Cam Photo of FP194(K304) at White Oak Conservation Center, November 14, 2011. Photo by Karen Ziegler-Meeks*  
*Below: FWC Veterinarian Mark Cunningham (assisted by Deborah Jansen) sedated FP194 with a syringe on a pole and administered a comprehensive stabilization of the wounded cat in the field. Photo by Rebecca Rising*



All four feet had multiple puncture wounds, and the rest of his body exhibited various cuts and tears. His condition left little room for confidence.

By dusk, we were ready to transport FP194. Mark and the panther were situated uncomfortably in the metal bed of one buggy with Deb and Gary seated in front. John and I rode in the other. The night was beautifully starry and the air deliciously fresh. It would have been a fabulous time if not for the panther's precarious condition. I was anxious, afraid the panther might not have survived the trip out of the wild. But when his buggy arrived after ours, he was still alive. He had now received four hours of care, and as Mark made plans for further treatment (a local veterinarian, then transport to Gainesville, Florida overnight), I became more hopeful that he would survive, and one day return (again) to his home in the swamp.

His death in the early morning was disappointing to all of us who have known this panther in some way or another, from reading about his progress since he was a kitten, to fighting with him for his life. Still, there are ways to celebrate a life after it has passed,

and in this case, we can celebrate the courageous struggle for a free existence displayed by FP194. We can also celebrate the human achievements in rehabilitation, veterinary care, habitat protection, and community support that he inspired. I can be happy that at least FP194 enjoyed some time exploring Big Cypress National Preserve as a wild animal in his extraordinary natural home. And we know that there is another panther, of equal importance, without a radio collar or close monitoring, but with an equal right to roam, find prey and a mate, and sadly, even to attack other panthers. To quote Deborah Jansen quoting Temple Grandin, "Animals make us human".

(Refer to the May and December 2011 Florida Panther Update issues for earlier articles about FP194/K304 on [www.fws.gov/floridapanther/pantherupdate.html](http://www.fws.gov/floridapanther/pantherupdate.html))



*K304 at his den, June 06, 2010. © Ralph Arwood*

### Collared Florida Panther Numbering System Leaps into the "Two Hundreds" *By Roxann Hanson, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge volunteer*

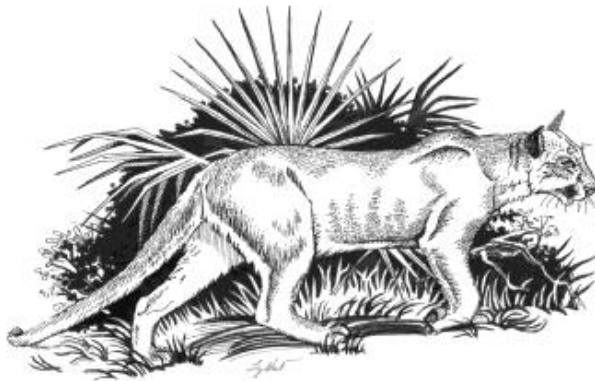
Panther capture season has just concluded for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and is winding down for Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP). These are the two agencies currently monitoring Florida panthers in the field using tracking collars.

The FWC season ran from November 28, 2011 through February 24, 2012 - with a total of fifty hunt days. Mark Lotz, FWC panther biologist commented, "Our season started later than planned due to a weather system which resulted in extremely wet ground conditions - less than ideal for working with panthers. This season we collared a total of nine panthers. Two of these were recollars; one still had a working collar that was scheduled for replacement (FP183) and one was recaptured after his collar had failed and fallen off a couple of years ago (FP159).

Big Cypress started their month-long season on February 9. So far, they have captured six panthers: three recaptures and three "new". On their first day of hunting, they collared a new female panther, FP199, in the Addlands. The next day, they collared a new male, FP211, in the same area. Why did the numbering bound so quickly from 199 to 211? BCNP's Deborah Jansen explained, "The number 200 was given to "Big Guy" a young male injured on Hwy 41 near Turner River Road in 1984. He remained in captivity due to the severity of his injuries. The other ten numbers were assigned to the ten kittens and juveniles removed in 1992 for the captive breeding program. Scientists back then probably never anticipated the level of success we've had with panther population recovery to date."

## Notices and Links

**Celebrate "Save the Florida Panther Day" at the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge Open House.** Saturday, March 17, 2012. 7:30am – 1:00pm. For information go to: [www.fws.gov/floridapanther](http://www.fws.gov/floridapanther)



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

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

**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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