

Florida Panther Field Note

September 2008

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September Mortalities – Two Men and a Baby

Three panthers died this month: two adult males and a young kitten. Both males were discovered on September 15. There have been 15 panther mortalities recorded so far this year: 6 vehicle mortalities, 2 intraspecific aggression (fights between panthers), and 7 from unknown or other causes.

The Men

- **FP155.** FP155's radio collar was emitting a mortality signal on Monday morning during a routine telemetry monitoring flight. A few members of our FWC team traveled out to collect the remains from a wooded area near the Lee County landfill. Unfortunately vultures had quickly consumed most of the carcass and a cause of death could not be determined from what remained. FP155 was first captured last season and was about 3 years old when he died.
- **UCFP109.** Also that morning, one of our wildlife officers reported that a local property owner had found a panther skeleton. Arrangements were made to meet him at his location near Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. The vultures were long done with the dead panther but the skull and wear on the teeth revealed it to have been an adult male approximately 8 years old.

The Baby

- **UCFP110.** The first road kill mortality ever recorded in Everglades National Park occurred on September 29 at 10:15 p.m. near the entrance station. UCFP110 was a 2 to 3-month old female kitten that weighed nine pounds. Tragically, she ran in front of a vehicle driven by one whose job it is to protect the wildlife of the park, a park service ranger. Ironically, law enforcement personnel have accounted for three of the six road mortalities this year. The devoted mother has been seen several times standing by the roadway calling and waiting for her baby.

Double Headers

Finding two dead panthers on the same day may seem like a very rare occurrence but it has happened four other times in the past.

- On *May 7, 2001*, 10-month-old siblings **UCFP39** and **UCFP40** were both killed on SR29 between Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP). The first kitten, a female, was picked up over night by one of our wildlife officers. When a field biologist went out the following morning to get a GPS coordinate, the second kitten, a male, was discovered. Presumably the family was waiting around for the other kitten to follow and in the process a second one was struck and killed.
- On *September 13, 2001*, two radio collared panthers were found dead as indicated by the signal on their collars. **FP112** was killed by a male panther

orphaning her 2 3-month-old kittens in BCNP. **FP32** died of old age on the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. This was just two days after “9/11” and a vehicle with suspected terrorists had been stopped on the Alligator Alley portion of I-75 about a mile from the entrance to the refuge. FP32’s remains were picked up the following day because law enforcement agencies had closed the Alley from Naples to Ft. Lauderdale and wouldn’t let anyone pass.

- On **February 27, 2006**, two panthers were recovered in Lee County. **UCFP81** was a 2-year-old male hit by a vehicle on I-75 near Ft. Myers. **UCFP82** was discovered on private property west of SR29 near Felda. FWC panther staff was not notified about this panther until several weeks later and only bones were recovered. No skull was found but other skeletal measurements suggest it was a young male.
- On **June 23, 2007**, another pair of road-killed panthers was recovered. **UCFP100** was a two year old male hit on SR29 just south of Immokalee. **K199** (a kitten handled at the den but never radio collared), a 20-month-old offspring of FP110, was hit on CR832 in Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest. Four fetuses (1 male, 3 females) were discovered upon necropsy. They were less than 2 weeks from being born.

One Panther’s Legacy – The Story of “Ranger”

“Ranger” was formally introduced to the public in an unveiling at the FWC Naples Wildlife Officer Field Office on Shell Island Road north of Marco Island on September 15th. This lifelike, taxidermic version of an authentic Florida panther is now available to everyone for viewing on exhibition at the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center on Tower Road. But it doesn’t end there. Ranger’s primary purpose is to serve as a mobile educational display. And he comes well equipped to do so. This “Cat on Wheels”(attached under his platform) is already being scheduled by the FWC, Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge, and other agencies for appearances at fairs, schools, zoos and annual events like Save the Panther Week which takes place in March.

This young adult panther, identified as UCFP87 by biologists, became immortalized as “Ranger” by perishing in a vehicle collision. He was hit and killed around 5:30 a.m. on Corkscrew Road (near Alico Road) in Lee County on August 26, 2006. He was estimated to be 3 years old and weighed 136 pounds at the time of his death. Because of the good condition of his remains, FWC officials decided to have UCFP87 preserved in a lifelike state for use as an educational aid. Road-kills account for a substantial number of Florida panther deaths each year. Ranger became the 9th road-kill out of 11 total road deaths in 2006 on the day his remains were collected. In this case “Ranger’s” untimely loss of life is unique, serving a purpose in helping his species survive in Florida through education and outreach.



"Ranger" – FWC's newest educational tool. Ranger's motto is, obey night time speed limits.
Photo by Mark Lotz