

Florida Panther Update

August 2006

Prepared by Mark Lotz

We have received a lot of inquiries wondering why the *Field Notes* have not been updated recently. I would love to give you a laundry list of reasons, and they're all true, but the bottom line is that I just haven't had the time. The good news is, due to the overwhelming response from all of you, the Field Notes will continue to be updated on a regular basis. A lot has happened since the last update so let's get caught up.

Agency News

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recently went through a reorganization process which was intended to separate research and management personnel in order to prevent any potential influences from affecting either side. While this approach seems to work on harvested species with a large workforce, such as game fish species, we in the panther section have been slowly adapting to this new format. Under the reorganization our panther team was split among two divisions. The "veteran" crew includes Darrell Land and Mark Lotz in the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation's Imperiled Species Management Section and veterinarian, Dr. Mark Cunningham within FWC's Florida Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI). In the wake of the reorganization two new faces, Dave Onorato and John Benson, were welcomed to our team from FWRI on August 1st, 2005.

Hurricane Wilma

Hurricane Wilma blew ashore near Cape Romano, just south of Marco Island, on October 24th 2005 and beat a path across the state exiting by Ft. Lauderdale. One of the questions I'm always asked is how the panthers fare during a hurricane. They do just fine and don't seem to be bothered by them. In fact, they're probably safer than we are because they don't have roofs and walls to fall on them. They most likely ride out the storm in a palmetto thicket which is quite effective at deflecting winds. Although some trees may fall, the odds of one hitting a panther are remote. We have never documented a panther death resulting from a hurricane. Our office building suffered some damage but luckily the side where the FWC offices are located did not sustain any damage. However, we were without power for the week necessitating us to run the freezers off of generators in order to preserve archived panther samples and other frozen samples. Perhaps the biggest inconvenience the storm caused was to our ability to maneuver through the woods during the capture season. Downed trees riddled the trails and, in the beginning, we easily spent more time clearing trails than hunting panthers. Slowly but surely we cleared enough pathways to make effective hunting routes.

Florida Panther #79 Removed to Permanent Captivity

In January 2006, male panther #79 was involved in an altercation with two dogs belonging to a private individual that lives within the boundaries of Big Cypress National Preserve and within FP79's home range. Two weeks later FP79 was relocated to another part of his home range from a nearby campground where he had been loitering. The following week he had ventured to an area outside of his typical home range and depredated (preyed upon) a domestic pig. Based on this changed behavior, an apparent escalation in his fondness for easily captured domestic offerings and the potential for this leading to future public safety concerns, the decision was made to remove FP79 from the wild and place him in permanent captivity. FP79 is 11-years-old and has sired most of the litters in Big Cypress National preserve south of I-75. Based on his reduced home range size in recent years and his advanced age (10 years is old for a wild male panther) he was likely nearing the end of his tenure. Removing him from the population at this time had no adverse effects on the population and ensured that his behavior would not escalate into a serious human incident. He has adapted well to captive life at Busch Gardens in Tampa where he is kept out of the public viewing area.

Panther Pulse

Are you curious to know how many panthers have been born and how many have died? Keep your finger on the pulse with these summary tables.

Here are some tips to help you decipher the tables.

Panther identification: when a kitten is handled at the den a transponder is inserted under the skin which permanently identifies that individual and it receives a "K" number. When a panther is captured and wears a radio collar it gets an "FP" number. FP just stands for Florida panther; they are numbered sequentially as they're captured. A panther that has never been handled at the den or captured for placement of a radio collar is identified as an uncollared Florida panther and has the designation "UCFP."

Mortality Causes: **IA** = intraspecific aggression (panthers killing panthers), **RK** = road kill.

Location: **BCNP** = Big Cypress National Preserve (specific units within BCNP include Add Lands, Bear Island), **FPNWR** = Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, **OSSF** = Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest, **SIR** = Seminole Indian Reservation, **ENP** = Everglades National Park

2005 Dens								
FP Mother	FP Father	Date Kittens Handled	Age When Handled	Litter Composition				Location
				Male	Female	Total	K#	
124	Unknown	2/10/05	2 wks	2	1	3	175, 176, 177	BCNP
110	Unknown	3/7/05	12 d	1	1	2	178, 179	OSSF
107	119/131	3/15/05	2 wks	0	2	2	180, 181	Collier's N. of FPNWR
129	Unknown	4/6/05	10 d	2	1	3	182, 183, 184	BCNP
113	131/133	4/20/05	~ 2 wks	1	1	2	185, 186	FPNWR
116	Unknown	6/19/05	3 wks	2	1	3	187, 188, 189	Add Lands
128	Unknown	7/21/05	3 wks	2	0	2	190, 191	SIR
75	135	8/7/05	1 wk	2	2	4	192, 193, 194, 195	Bear Island
110	Unknown	11/1/05	3 wks	3	1	4	196, 197, 198, 199	OSSF
Totals	9 dens			15	10	25		

2005 Mortality						
Panther #	Sex	Age (yrs)	Date Collected	Cause	County	Location
FP126	M	1.6	1/3/05	IA	Collier	Private land E. of Immok, S. of CR846
UCFP71	M	≤3	2/4/05	RK	Collier	US41 by 11 mile rd.
UCFP72	M	2	2/25/05	RK	Collier	SR29 Deep Lake
UCFP73	M	7 mo	4/7/05	RK	Collier	CR951
FP120	F	5	5/7/05	RK	Collier	US41 Turner River
UCFP74	M	2-3	6/4/05	RK	St. Johns/Flagler	I-95
FP136	F	4	6/14/05	Unknown (spinal fracture)	Collier	BCNP
UCFP75	M	~2	6/19/05	RK	Collier	SR29 Owl Hammock
K153	M	2	8/29/05	RK	Collier	CR951
FP69	F	8	9/14/05	Unknown	Collier	Add Lands
UCFP76	M	1	9/18/05	RK	Collier	US41 Manatee Rd
K49	F	7 yr 10 mo	12/2/05	RK	Collier	SR29 Copeland
Total = 12 Roadkills = 9, Intraspecific aggression = 1, Unknown/other = 2						

Here's what's happened so far this year.

2006 Dens (January 1 – August 18)								
FP Mother	FP Father	Date Kittens Handled	Age When Handled	Litter Composition				Location
				Male	Female	Total	K#'s	
107	131	2/17/2006	~6 days	1	1	2	F200, M201	FPNWR
121	Unknown	3/5/2006	~12 days	2	1	3	F202, M203, M204	SIR
94	Unknown	6/22/06	2.5 wks	1	2	3	F205, M206, F207	ENP
145	138	6/23/06	12 days	0	3	3	F208, F209, F210	BCNP
93	133	7/1/06	18 days	0	3	3	F211, F212, F213	BCNP
95	Unknown	7/3/06	10 days	1	2	3	F214, F216, M217	ENP
102	138	7/12/06	18 days	2	0	2	M218, M219	BCNP



We had to revert to monitoring FP94's den in Everglades National Park the old fashioned way because phone service at the den site was unavailable making the "biologist-in-a-box" useless. After 10 days of pre-dawn vigils and late afternoon monitoring sessions our efforts were finally rewarded when FP94 left the den to go grab a bite to eat.



A remote camera captures FP121 shortly after she left the den with her kitten on the Seminole Indian Reservation.

2006 Mortality (January 1 – August 18)						
Panther ID	Sex	Age (yrs)	Date Collected	Cause	County	Location
FP70	F	9	1/14/2006	RK	Collier	US41 @ Turner River
UCFP77	F	2-3	1/15/2006	IA	Hendry	BCSIR by West Boundry Canal
UCFP78	M	9 mo	1/25/2006	RK	Collier	CR846, 1 mi W of CR858
UCFP79	F	2	1/26/2006	RK	Collier	CR846, 2 mi N of CR858
UCFP80	M	1.5	2/2/2006	RK	Dade	Card Sound Rd, 8 mi S of Card Sound/US1 intersection
UCFP81	M	2-3	2/27/2006	RK	Lee	I-75 near Exit 138 (Ft Myers)
UCFP82	M	unk	2/27/2006	Unknown	Lee	Duda Ranch N of Felda (bones only)
FP104	M	5.5	3/9/2006	viral?	Collier	BCNP
UCFP83	M	3	3/14/2006	IA	Lee	Flint Pen Strand
FP129	F	5	3/22/2006	IA	Collier	BCNP
K203	M	1 mo	4/6/2006	Unknown	Hendry	BCSIR
UCFP84	M	3-4	4/14/2006	RK	Osceola	I-4
UCFP85	M	4	6/5/06	RK	Hendry	CR832