



# Florida Panther Update

December 2009

## Field Stories

### First Capture: A Male in His Prime

*Story and Photos by Mark Lotz*

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's 2009/10 capture season which began *November 4<sup>th</sup>* has been going well with two five-year-old panthers collared in November: male FP144 and female FP172. We worked through November in a section of Big Cypress National Preserve known as the "Addition Lands". It's one of the greater expanses of land we deal



FP 144, Above: Captured *February 2006*

Below: Recaptured *November 2009*



*Five-Year-Old Female FP172 Captured November 12*

with. Ever since the preserve acquired this property it has been closed to hunting and off road vehicle use. Consequently, most of the trails that hunters formerly maintained are severely overgrown, sometimes making them a challenge to traverse with a buggy.

On Thursday, *November 5<sup>th</sup>* we caught the first cat late in the day. Roy McBride's hounds treed a male which had climbed about fifteen feet up an oak tree. Other members of the FWC capture team, Marc Criffield, Mark Cunningham, and I arrived shortly thereafter. As expected, being so close to the ground, and despite our best efforts to keep him in place, the cat leapt out of the tree after being hit with the dart. The chase was on. We and the hounds crashed through palmettos into a fairly open cypress grove, dodging cypress knees along the way while trying to avoid getting tripped up on vines. We soon caught up to the panther and brought him under control. Everything with this panther capture now became routine. While examining him, I noticed faint blue dots in his ears: sign of a tattoo. His ears were tattered from battle wounds so I could only make out one number, "4". This animal had been collared before. Could it have been FP124, 134, or 144? FP144 became my best guess because the Addition Lands were known to be part of his home range before his GPS collar had failed. A scan with the transponder revealed his microchip number and confirmed he was indeed FP144. He had been fitted with a GPS collar almost three years ago but it later failed prematurely. That data is now lost in the woods somewhere because the preprogrammed breakaway device on the collar must have engaged in spite of the loss of GPS functionality. This was good news for FP144; it freed him from wearing a collar indefinitely. Bad news for us; the data is gone. He weighed 124 pounds, was in good condition and is likely the dominant male in the area. His presence would explain the "hole" we have been seeing there when doing telemetry locations. The other collared males in the vicinity venture into "his" part of the Addition Lands very infrequently. Adult male panthers' territories vary with age and neighboring males. Young adults start with relatively small areas. They are trying to stay out of trouble. Prime, dominant adult territories are usually the

largest. Old adults' (10 years plus) home ranges shrink as younger (prime) males start taking over. I would expect data from FP144's new collar to reveal that he has grown his territory since we last documented his home range.

### **Headless Panther Carcass Discovered**

Dave Onorato of the FWC reported that on the afternoon of November 19, FWC's law enforcement officers recovered the carcass (20th wild panther mortality in 2009) of a Florida panther from the shoulder of the southbound lanes of the Florida Turnpike close to the Osceola and Indian River county line. The carcass was decapitated. The case is currently under investigation and a reward is being offered. "Possession of endangered species parts is illegal", one panther biologist commented, "I'm sure it is difficult not to brag about having a panther skull. Lots of people will probably soon know who has it so let's find the perpetrator." For more information go to: [http://www.myfwc.com/NEWSROOM/09/northeast/News\\_09\\_N\\_E\\_PantherDecapitated.htm](http://www.myfwc.com/NEWSROOM/09/northeast/News_09_N_E_PantherDecapitated.htm)

### **Possecam Reports on FP113's Kitten**

The *October/November* Florida Panther Posse field-cam (infrared motion camera) photos are in. The Posse kids are delighted to find FP113's kitten still alive, hanging out with Mom, and looking healthy at about six months of age. For more field-cam photos go to: <http://www.fgcu.edu/CAS/WingsofHope/gallery.html>



**Keeping Mom in Sight!**



**Can You Find the Kitten?**

*Photos Copyright FGCU "Wings of Hope" Florida Panther Posse*

## **What People are Doing**

### **Cougar Network Makes Puma ID & Field Guides Available**

The Cougar Network has published an abbreviated Puma ID Guide and a full-length Puma Field Guide authored by leading wildlife biologists. The guides cover the Biological Considerations, General Life History, Identification, Assessment, and Management of Puma concolor. To download the guides free of charge go to <http://www.cougarnet.org/idguide.html>

**The Sierra Club Builds Upon a Petition Filed in January by the Conservancy** for panther habitat protection north of Cabosahatchee River <http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2009/nov/19/sierra-club-petitions-panther-habitat-protection-n/>

## **What You Can Do**

### **Help Spread the Word .....**

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is seeking information about a decapitated panther carcass found along the Florida Turnpike near the Osceola and Indian River county line *November 19*. Anyone with information can call the Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-3922; they can remain anonymous and may be eligible for up to a \$1,000 reward if their information leads to an arrest.



### **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>

**Updates Are Compiled By Roxann Hanson, Panther Update Editor**

Friends of the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge: c/o U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

3860 Tollgate Boulevard, Suite 300

Naples, FL 34114

**Past Issues:** <http://www.floridapanther.org/newsletter.html> E-mail: [Panthereditor@gmail.com](mailto:Panthereditor@gmail.com)