

Florida Panther Capture Season Update
February 2001
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We covered a lot of ground this month while catching panthers in Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve (FSSP), Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP), the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR), and Everglades National Park (ENP). Three panthers were recollared, two new panthers were added to the radio-collared population, one died, and three neonates were handled at one den. Much of our effort in BCNP was devoted to finding #70_{F1} and replacing the failed radio collar. Additionally, in Big Cypress, an uncollared male panther was treed on the 14th south of US 41. However, this cat was quite skittish and jumped each time the tree was approached. We eventually called off the capture to avoid further heat stress to the panther.

Recollars

#59 (male) - February 15. We hadn't planned on changing this panther's collar at the beginning of the capture season. However, a few weeks ago we noticed that the signal strength was greatly reduced. Number 59 spends a considerable amount of time on private lands north of the FPNWR. As soon as he returned to public land where we were permitted to work, we took advantage of his location and changed the collar. Upon inspecting the collar, we discovered that the antenna had broken off causing the reduced signal strength.

#85_{B-FL} (male) - February 26. This panther was collared last year when he was 10 months old. We had to change his collar to give him room to grow. He has spent most of his time in the northern portion of ENP which is comprised of sawgrass marsh dotted with numerous small hardwood hammocks. It was not until this time that the water had receded sufficiently to make a capture attempt safe. Although there was no standing water, the muck was still very moist. We sank up to our knees making our way to the panther. But he was safely immobilized and we changed his collar. He had put on 40 pounds since his last capture a year ago.



Improvisation was the rule at this capture as there were no trees from which to hang the IV bag.

#86_{F2} (female) - February 27. This panther was captured last year as an eight-month-old kitten. It was time to replace the kitten collar with an adult size collar. We caught up to her near the oil pads in the "11 Mile Road" area of BCNP. Her weight had almost doubled in the past year to 60 pounds. She also had a healed fracture on her back leg. She obviously managed to survive through this ordeal. The leg has free range of motion and the injury does not appear to be an impediment to her movements.

New Panthers

#101 (female) - February 5. A small two-year-old female was caught in the Addition Lands of BCNP. She only weighed 56 pounds but was in good health.

#102 (female) - February 20. While hunting for the elusive #70_{F1} with the failed radio collar in BCNP, we treed a mother panther and an eight- to nine-month-old kitten. We opted to capture the mother. She was uncollared so we knew it wasn't #70_{F1}. When we scanned her, we found a transponder. Her transponder number showed that she was born in February 1998 to panther #55. We have seen tracks of panther family groups in many of the areas we've been hunting on BCNP. Now that #102 is collared, we will be able to differentiate sign from her family and those that are still uncollared (or not functioning).



Panther #102's heart rate is monitored with a portable EKG.

Deaths

#11 (female) - February 26. Number 11 was discovered "in mortality" during a routine telemetry flight. Due to her proximity to CR846 east of Immokalee it was initially suspected that she was hit by a vehicle. However, there is evidence to suggest that she may have fought with another panther. A necropsy is still pending. This panther was the oldest one we had collared. She was 19-20 years old at the time of her death. She appeared to be healthy and in good body condition when she died. She was initially captured in the Bear Island Unit of BCNP in 1986 where she spent most of her life. Interestingly, for the last three years of her life she utilized a completely different home range several miles from her former residence. The cause of this shift is unknown.

Births

#87_{B-FL} (female) - February 7. #87_{B-FL} gave birth in late January and on February 7 the den was visited. Three kittens, two males and one female, were marked with transponders.

Their weights ranged from 2 pounds, 10 ounces to 3 pounds, 9 ounces. All appeared healthy.