

## **Florida Panther Capture Season Update November 7-17, 2000**

The weather has cooled in south Florida initiating the 2000/2001 Florida panther capture season, the time when we change old radio collars and capture “new” Florida panthers. Our first two weeks were like basic training for panther capture work. We encountered everything from the routine to emergency situations.

Dr. Mark Cunningham is joining us this year in the veterinary position on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission panther capture team. Dr. Mark is no stranger to Florida panther field work. He has assisted several of the vets over the past seven years. We’re lucky to have someone with his specific experience join our team. The other members include myself; Mark Lotz, the tree climber; David Shindle, field boss; Roy McBride, houndsman; and the “professors” (Roy’s dogs) Rosie, Ruby, Coco, Tuffy, and Clack.

### **Tuesday November 7, 2000**

#### ***Panther #95<sub>F1</sub> First Capture***

Our activities began where we left last capture season, in Everglades National Park. We caught a new panther the very first day. It was identified by the transponder as “K46.” This F1 female was one of TX108's kittens handled in January 1998. She was now almost three years old and weighed 95 pounds. Her new ID is panther #95<sub>F1</sub>.

Our remaining goals in the Park are to re-establish contact with TX105 whose radio collar has malfunctioned and to capture the young male we collared last season and fit him with a new collar to accommodate his anticipated growth.



**Dr. Mark Cunningham examines #95F1**

### **Friday November 10, 2000**

### ***Panther #89 Dead***

Male panther #89, captured last season, was detected in mortality by the Big Cypress National Preserve crew. Luckily we were able to make use of a Commission helicopter to investigate the scene. It would have taken several hours to get to the location by swamp buggy. Number 89 was killed by male #79<sub>F1</sub> (this is known as *intraspecific aggression*). The skirmish was likely related to two females that were also in the area.



**Panther #89 lies dead in grass trampled down by dozens of vultures**

**Wednesday November 15, 2000**

### ***Panther #79<sub>F1</sub> Recollared/Electroejaculated***

We had gotten word from the Big Cypress crew that #79<sub>F1</sub>'s collar was not transmitting normally. The distance the collar could be heard was substantially reduced. He was scheduled to be recollared this season. Additionally, a reproductive exam was to be conducted to investigate the effects of genetic restoration. Again we were able to make use of the Commission helicopter which greatly facilitated the transport of the additional equipment required for the reproductive exam. The results of the exam were excellent. Sperm motility was identified to be 80%. This compares to just 38% in "pure" Florida panthers. Other sperm characteristics were also very good. Number 79<sub>F1</sub> weighed 154 pounds and was in excellent condition except for a few scratches he suffered during his battle with #89



**A probe inserted anally electrically stimulates the muscles around the prostate gland. The ejaculate is collected in a vial for microscopic inspection.**

Upon examining the collar we noticed that the side of the canister was dented and had a small puncture in it. Moisture was likely entering through this puncture

affecting the mechanical components. The dent appears to have been caused by a canine tooth of another panther. However, Big Cypress noticed problems with the collar before #79<sub>F1</sub> and #89 had their encounter. Assuming the canine theory to be true, it's possible that #79<sub>F1</sub> and #89 had a previous, non-lethal encounter in which #79<sub>F1</sub>'s collar was damaged. Or there could be another uncollared male that inflicted the damage.

**Friday November 17, 2000**

***Panther #65<sub>F1</sub> Recollared - Removed With Broken Leg***

Male panther #65<sub>F1</sub> was also due to be recollared and have a reproductive exam. Unfortunately, during the capture effort, he suffered a broken back leg (right tibia). There was nothing out of the ordinary with this capture, nothing different from the hundreds of other captures we have successfully performed. In fact, all indications were that this was going to be an easy capture. He was low in the tree and jumped out under his own power before the drugs had time to affect his coordination. It was a freak accident that illustrates how unpredictable even "safe" captures can be. Number 65<sub>F1</sub> was stabilized and flown to the University of Florida Vet School in Gainesville where he underwent surgery to repair the damaged bone. Plans are for him to recover at the White Oak Conservation Center (which specializes in endangered species conservation and has helped with previous Florida panther conservation endeavors) then be returned to the wild as soon as possible. We will keep you updated on his progress.



**Panther #65F1 is loaded in helicopter ready for transport to the University of Florida Veterinary School for surgery**