

**Florida Panther Field Note**  
**October – December 2001**  
*Prepared by Mark Lotz*

Our capture season, the time when we collar new individuals and replace older radio-collars with weakening batteries, got started on November 1<sup>st</sup> this year. This season looks to be shorter than in years past because we'll be focusing primarily on maintaining the collared population and expending less effort on acquiring "new" panthers. However, we will be deploying Global Positioning System (GPS) collars to test their effectiveness on panthers in this habitat and for that we will need a couple of new recruits.

In addition to the GPS study, we're also conducting a scat DNA study and remote camera survey study. The scat DNA study will determine the feasibility of using panther scats to identify individuals and to monitor the effects of genetic introgression. We hope this information will allow us to gauge the genetic health of the panther population and determine when additional *Puma* genes are needed to maintain a genetically healthy population. The primary focus of the camera study is to determine the effectiveness of using remotely triggered cameras to monitor the population. The field portion (a.k.a. the fun part) has concluded for both of these studies. Now it's time to analyze the data collected and write our reports.

We've captured 6 panthers so far; 4 were scheduled for recollaring (FP's 78, 87, 96, and 99) and 2 were previously uncollared (FP's 107 and 108). One panther, FP97, died from intraspecific aggression during this reporting period.

**Thursday November 1, 2001**

Our day began bright and early down in Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) waiting to hear the location of FP87<sub>B-FL</sub>. She was due for a collar change last season but was raising very young kittens at the time. Because of this, we thought it was safest to wait until the kittens were older and able to elude the dogs. The signal from her collar was beginning to get weak indicating the batteries were about to give out (as expected). However, the high water in the area created unsafe conditions for a capture.

Having no luck with FP87<sub>B-FL</sub>, we headed to the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR) where a couple of young males needing larger collars still resided. **FP96** was the first to be recollared. He was 1 year-7 months old and weighed 92 pounds. Luckily for us he was easily accessible next to a trail we could drive our trucks down.



**Due to the circumference of FP 96's neck and the potential for further growth, the collar is fitted with a "break-away" device for safety.**

Afterwards, we headed to where FP99 was hanging out, also near a trail. The dogs ran into the hammock where FP99's signal was coming from and quickly treed a panther. However, it wasn't what we expected. An uncollared female panther was treed. We proceeded to capture and collar this panther and discovered, through the transponder, that this was the offspring of FP78 born in April 2000. She was the sister of FP96. Her number is **FP107**. She weighed 74 pounds at 1 year-7 months old.

### **Saturday November 3, 2001**

After having the same luck with FP87<sub>B-FL</sub> on Friday as we did on Thursday, we were back at it again. She had finally moved to an area with better conditions for capture. After driving a couple of hours in the swamp buggy we were in range of the family group. The first panther the dogs treed was one of FP87<sub>B-FL</sub>'s kittens. Roy was able to pull the dogs away and get them going again. Another one of her kittens was soon treed. Knowing we don't get too many chances (the dogs don't know the difference between a collared and uncollared panther) we opted to collar this kitten. This was done so we could maintain contact with the family group (and FP87<sub>B-FL</sub>) in case we weren't able to catch her before her collar quit. **FP108** was an 11-month-old, 74-pound male and the newest member of the radio-collared population.



**Not all cowlicks are as large as FP108's.**

After completing his work-up, we decided to give **FP87<sub>B-FL</sub>** one more shot. We were finally successful and changed her collar without incident. She was in good shape considering she was raising kittens and weighed in at 80 pounds.

### **Tuesday November 6, 2001**

FP99 continued to be slippery as we made another attempt to capture him. Interestingly, he was with FP96 who the dogs happened to tree rather than the intended FP99. The dogs were made to follow FP99 but in the process got split up. One of them began trailing FP107, who was also nearby, and the other dogs naturally helped out. After treeing FP107 (and "ridding" the area of non-target panthers) **FP99** was finally treed. He was estimated to be 1 year-9 months old (exact birth date unknown) and weighed 102 pounds.



**Note the peculiar black spot on the front of FP99's muzzle.**

**Wednesday November 28, 2001**

**FP104** was released back to his natal range on BCNP after recovering from a broken leg [see April 2001 Field Note]. He was in captivity for approximately 8 months and was now over 1 year old and weighed 99 pounds. Everyone involved in FP104's return to the wild should be commended. These include, but are by no means limited to, our very own staff veterinarian, Dr. Mark Cunningham, who provided initial critical care at the capture site, the surgical team and others at the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine who assisted in correcting the fracture, the caring staff of Lowry Park Zoo where FP104 resided until the fracture had healed, and the expert staff at White Oak Plantation who, among other things, provided prey items so FP104 could learn the skills necessary for survival. Since his release, FP104 has explored his natal range and beyond. Life is not easy for young male panthers but so far all is well.

**Monday December 3, 2001**

During a routine telemetry flight an "in mortality" signal was detected from the collar of **FP97** (brother of FP99). FP97 was located on private land east of Immokalee. He had been venturing into new territory for the past several weeks. Upon investigating the scene, it was determined that a resident adult male panther killed him. Tracks of this resident, along with tracks of an uncollared female, were present near the site.

**Friday December 14, 2001**

FP78 was located with male FP59 in October. Assuming she was now pregnant, we wanted to change her collar before she reached the third trimester of her pregnancy. This would cause the least potential disruption to the normal development of the fetuses. We captured **FP78** on the west side of the FPNWR in a small oak hammock. She weighed 74 pounds and the hormone levels in her blood indicated she was not pregnant.