

Panther Capture Activities
28 February - 3 March, 2000
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This week was devoted to working on Big Cypress National Preserve. We captured three panthers (#87, #88_{F2} and #89) and two others died (K76, #68).

Monday, 28 February, 2000

Panther #55 gave birth to two kittens, a male and female, in April 1999. Our suspicions are that #79_{F1} sired this litter. However, he was not collared at the time #55 got pregnant therefore we cannot declare this with 100 percent certainty. On this day #55 was in a good place to see tracks in order to verify that she was still raising kittens. We found evidence to support that indeed both kittens were still with her. The dogs were led toward #55's signal and a kitten was promptly treed. Panther #87, now 10 months old, weighed 60 pounds. We later discovered the remains of a deer carcass that the family had consumed.



Members of the capture team take the opportunity to document a deer that was fed upon by #55 and her offspring.

Tuesday, 29 February, 2000

You may recall that panther #66_{F1} gave birth to three kittens that were handled on Christmas Eve last year. The kittens are now old enough to follow their mother to kills. It was suspected that she would eventually lead them across CR 858 where she typically spends most of her time. She led them to the south side of the road but unfortunately not all of them made it. The male kitten, K76, was struck

and killed by a vehicle. (The panthers are not assigned a “panther number” until they are collared. However, each kitten marked with a transponder at the den is assigned a “K” [kitten] number). Number 66_{F1} hung around the road a few days presumably looking for her lost kitten before she finally moved on.

Thursday, 2 March, 2000

When it rains, it pours! At least that’s how it seems to go in the panther business. We caught two panthers today making it the third time this season we’ve done that. A lot happened this day so let me back up just a bit and start from the beginning.

Florida panther #70_{F1}'s collar failed in late January of this year. She is currently raising three kittens that she gave birth to in June 1999. This litter is sired by #79_{F1} making these kittens “F2’s.” The combination of #70_{F1}'s collar being out and the kittens being F2's put this family group high on our priority list for capture. We had searched for sign of #70_{F1} and her family previously and found evidence indicating that all of her kittens were still alive. But we were always just a day or two behind them. Although we could still see tracks preserved in the mud they were never fresh enough for the dogs to trail. Yesterday we were all scattered out trying to regain contact with this family. I was fortunate enough to find the freshest sign which led us to hunt in Skillet Strand today. We arrived at sunrise and split up in order to cover more ground. The dogs began trailing a panther about 10:00 am. At the same time, and about 18 miles away, Rocky McBride (Roy’s son and employee of Rancher’s Supply) radioed that he had a panther in a tree. Rocky was here assisting Deb Jansen (Big Cypress National Preserve biologist) with panther survey work. Since there was a good chance that Roy’s dogs were trailing our priority, #70_{F1}'s family, we stayed with him. The dogs treed a female kitten now known as #88_{F2}. The course to where #88_{F2} was treed was not an easy one because there were no trails nearby. Dave and my ATVs acquired a few dings and scratches as we wove our way through prairies and cypress strands. Unfortunately cypress knees don’t bend like prairie grass and we eventually came to a point where we had to hike the rest of the way. The capture was quick and uneventful. The nine- month old kitten was about 22 feet up in a rather small cypress tree. She fell after being darted and we caught her in the net. A quick scan for a transponder revealed that it was in fact #70_{F1}'s daughter. Finding the group in the future will be a lot easier now that one of the family members is collared.



The first kitten from #70's litter awakens after being collared.

After completing the work-up on #88_{F2}, we all proceeded to where Rocky and his dogs had the other panther treed. Because of the distance from #88_{F2}'s capture site, it would have been impossible to get there in a reasonable amount of time to complete the necessary tasks. Fortunately, we were able to take advantage of the Park Service helicopter. We were all picked up and flown as close as possible to the site where the panther was treed. We filed in to the hammock and greeted a male panther estimated to be 2.5 years old. He was dubbed #89. He had positioned himself comfortably towards the outer reaches of the branch of an oak tree. I couldn't get out to where he was, so after climbing as close as I could I used a long stick to push him out. He was caught in the safety net by the crew below. Number 89 had all the traits typically associated with Florida panthers; a kinked tail, cowlick, and only one testicle. We also discovered a deer nearby that he was feeding on.

After finishing with #89, Roy, Dave and I were flown back to the first capture site where we left our buggy and ATV's. We tried to find a better way out than the route we took in. I don't know if our wandering exit through the woods was better, but we did make it out....just before sunset.



Dr. Kristin Charlton examines a pre-existing condition on male panther #89. Despite it's appearance the superficial wound is cleansed but otherwise left untreated.

Friday 3 March, 2000

Male panther #68's collar was beeping in the mortality mode during today's flight. When investigated it was discovered that his demise was caused by intraspecific aggression (killed by another panther). As far as panther fights are concerned this didn't appear to be a grueling one. In most cases it is not the actual wounds inflicted that cause the panther's death but rather the resulting infection from those wounds. That is likely what happened in this instance. Number 68 was killed by an uncollared male, possibly the same one that killed #45 (7/98) and #72 (12/98) both near this same area.