

Florida Panther Capture Activities
April 3-21, 2000
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During this three-week period we captured two new panthers (#92_{F2}, #93_{B-TX}) as well as recapturing the elusive TX107. Panther #84_{B-FL} became the third panther to cross the Caloosahatchee River but mysteriously died two weeks later in Fisheating Creek.

April 3-7

The first three days of this week were invested in finding TX107 in Big Cypress National Preserve. On Monday, we found tracks of the family group that had been made since we were last out on Thursday. However, it was made some time over the weekend and couldn't be trailed by the dogs. We never crossed their sign again this week.

On Thursday, panther #70_{F1} (being followed by her recently collared kittens #'s 88_{F2} and 91_{F2}) moved to an opportune location to make an attempt at capturing her (to replace the non-functioning collar) or her last uncollared kitten. A panther was quickly treed and no radio signal emanated from where the dogs were barking. This meant they had treed either #70_{F1} or her uncollared kitten. Upon walking up to the tree, we realized we had added a new panther to the study population; it was #70_{F1}'s male kitten to be distinguished as #92_{F2}. He was 10 months old and weighed 66 pounds.



“Young male panther #92_{F2} has plenty of room to grow into his new collar.”

April 10-14

We resumed our quest to find sign of TX107 near Windmill Prairie on Monday. We were scouting several miles from Roy when he called on the radio to inform us he was trailing a panther. We quickly made our way to him. Luckily, the dry conditions enabled us to make good time, especially once we reached the prairie. The panther was in the middle of a cypress strand and was perched about 60 feet high in a cypress tree. We readied the site and assembled the crash bag. The path between the dart gun and the panther was

obstructed by thick branches. Another complication was the wind, which could blow the dart off target. It also swayed the branches erratically blocking the dart's path in several places. The first three darts ricocheted off branches. But the fourth one hit its mark. The panther fell and was caught in the net and crash bag. We checked to see if it had a transponder. Having one, we quickly checked the list to see who it was. It was "K58," one of TX107's kittens! Her new number would be #93_{B-TX}. Now that we had one of TX107's kittens collared it would be a lot easier to find her.



"Number 93_{B-TX} receives an ear tattoo and vaccinations."

Having finally made contact with TX107's family, we headed over to Everglades National Park to look for any indication of TX105's kittens. TX105 was treed once with no evidence that a kitten(s) was present. There were no trails where TX105 had recently ventured, making tracking impossible. Dave and I went out one evening hoping to get a glimpse of her or her kittens (if she had any). However, she never revealed herself to us.

Also on Monday this week, panther #84_{B-FL} became the third collared panther to cross north of the Caloosahatchee River. Previous panthers to do this have been #62 in April 1998 who is still alive and prospecting the state and #74_{B-FL} in May 1999 who was later killed by a car on US 27 in September 1999. Panther #84_{B-FL} was found in the Fisheating Creek area west of US 27 near Palmdale during Monday's telemetry flight.

April 17-21

We began this week by scouting behind #93_{B-TX} to see if she and TX107 had reunited. Much to our dismay #93_{B-TX} was traveling alone. It had been several days since her capture, so #93_{B-TX} apparently was suffering no hardships due to her somewhat premature dispersal from her mother. This meant we had to start from scratch again to locate TX107. So our hunt continued. Over the past several weeks we had developed a clearer picture of where TX107 and her kittens were dwelling. We pressed on utilizing our knowledge of areas the family had visited, our intuition, and most importantly the dog's noses. On Wednesday, the long hours we spent and the many miles we traversed to locate TX107 finally paid off. She was treed in the same strand her daughter was found in just

nine days earlier. Interestingly, she was associating with male #79_{F1} and tracks also indicated her male kitten was still with her. The crash bag was once again required as she was 40 feet up the cypress tree. TX107 slowly worked her way down the tree as the drug took effect. Her landing in the crash bag was from a nominal height. Having contributed her component toward genetic restoration she was now due to have a contraceptive implant administered to prevent any further offspring from being introduced to the Florida panther population. The procedure was accomplished quickly and TX107 was released with a new collar.



“The contraceptive implant is placed under the skin of TX107 to prevent further reproduction.”

On Friday the 21st, panther #84_{B-FL} who had become the third panther documented to cross north of the Caloosahatchee River, just a couple of weeks ago (April 7-9, 2000) was detected in mortality in the Fisheating Creek area. He had not been dead long and was in very fresh condition. There were no signs of skirmishes with other panthers or foul play. Unfortunately, the necropsy did not reveal a cause of death. However an unidentified virus was isolated and sent to the Center for Disease Control for identification. So far it remains a mystery.



“Number 84_{B-FL} is found laying in the open next to a drying tributary of Fisheating Creek.”