

South Florida Deer Research Project Quarterly Update January – March 2015

Remote Cameras

- 180 remote trail cameras were deployed by the end of January. Each study site (Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, North Addition Lands and the Bear Island Units of Big Cypress National Preserve) camera grid currently has 60 cameras.
- Camera data from each of the 180 cameras were retrieved twice and cameras have been maintained as needed (i.e. clearing vegetation to limit false-tripping, replacing malfunctioning cameras).

Radio-Collared Deer

- A total of 109 deer were captured during 7 days of helicopter capture effort in early January. Deer were captured within Bear Island and North Addition Lands units. As anticipated, in the Panther Refuge, helicopter captures were not efficient due to canopy cover.
- The majority (60%) of the captured/collared deer were adult females. Overall age distribution was 12% 1.5-year-olds, 35% 2.5-year-olds and 53% 3-years or older. Six fawns (less than 1 years of age) were also captured and ear-tagged (not collared due to small size).
- Overall, the GPS location collars are functioning reliably and regularly delivered the scheduled number of locations (6 locations per day/deer), providing us detailed movement information for each individual deer.
- To date, 16 mortality events have been recorded, bringing the total number of radio-collared deer to 84 from the original 100.
- Cause of death was evaluated based on field evidence and necropsy (when feasible) for 11 deer. These included 8 panther predation events, 2 predation events where predator could not be confirmed (coyote or panther in one; bobcat or panther in another) and 1 suspected predation event where the predator was unknown. In some instances we cannot definitively eliminate the possibility of scavenging and the causes of all mortality data should be considered preliminary until all reviews are completed. Five of the 16 mortalities occurred less than two weeks from capture and as those mortalities could have been related to capture stress, they were not included in the cause-specific categories above.
- It is important to keep in mind that the survival rates currently represent only two and half months of data and more data from a longer time frame is needed to make any significant inferences. We will provide seasonal and annual survival rates as the study progresses.

Office work, Outreach, Future Plans

- Developed computer programs to more accurately indicate mortality events and to organize/process camera data.
- Job announcement for a technician was released, with a goal of hiring a technician for the project by early summer.
- *Outreach:* Dr. Cherry presented an overview of the research project at a Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge Event, Feb. 12th in Naples, FL.
- *Next quarter:* Resume capture efforts at the Panther Refuge using rocket-netting.