



Florida Panther *Update*

Field Stories

Yuma's Story

Story by Mac Hatcher, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR) Volunteer

It was a cold January morning when a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) biologist, assisted by a biologist from the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, went out early to check the den of FP195 in the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. The 6 year old radio collared female had been located in the same area for a while, so biologists had previously visited to pinpoint the den location. They deployed the biologist-in-a-box, which is a remote monitoring station that utilizes a cell phone hooked up to a receiver, that allows biologists to determine when mom has left the den. When the adult leaves the den they are safely able to workup any kittens. That chilly morning they found UCFP205, a week-old Florida panther kitten, alone in the den, eyes still shut, with a dangerously low body temperature and dehydrated. The biologists figured the kitten (unofficially dubbed "Chilly Willie") would not survive without intervention so they took him to the Animal Specialty Hospital in Naples for critical care. After a couple of days of around-the-clock intensive treatment, including being warmed, hydrated and fed, the young kitten's condition improved. After about a month he was transferred to Lowry Park Zoo for neonatal care and rearing.



UCFP205 at the den 1/23/14.



UCFP205 at Animal Specialty Hospital 1/24/14.

The Lowry Park Zoo Director of Medical Sciences, Dr. Ray Ball, and his team provided around-the-clock care to the kitten. He weighed 2.8 lbs. upon arriving at the zoo. In 3 weeks he was up to 4.1 lbs. and was very active, inquisitive and growing daily. The zoo posted videos of the kitten exploring and playing in the clinic as well as exploring outside. Zoo staff confined the kitten indoors for the first few weeks to mimic den conditions as much as possible then allowed the kitten outdoors.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofr-Y76iUPQ>, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-z3D9-KEYYg>) With the excellent care provided by the zoo staff he continued to grow, become more active and more inquisitive. At 7 to 8 weeks the zoo staff began moving him from bottled formula to a meat diet and provided his first round of vaccinations. With growth and maturity, he soon became confident enough to directly run toward and inspect new things that he noticed.

Even though UCFP205 is active, curious, has boundless energy and has hunting instincts, this is not sufficient to be on his own in the wild. Since he has been raised by people and not had any panther interactions from the time his eyes opened, he can't be released into the wild. Hunting and other panther skills instilled by the mother are necessary to survive in the wild. At about 2 1/2 months he was transferred to his permanent home at Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park which features native Florida wildlife.



Yuma at Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park

The native animals at Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park are ambassadors for their species and provide staff the opportunity to educate the public and increase awareness of wildlife issues. The park rangers worked with the kitten to make him comfortable with this role of ambassador. He was slowly acclimated to conditions of noise and people so that he could adapt. The park's staff asked employees and volunteers to suggest names for the kitten. Yuma, a Native American word meaning "son of the chief," was selected and announced during Earth Day celebrations. August 2014 was designated as Florida

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Panther Month at the wildlife park. On August 21st “Yuma” moved into the revamped panther exhibit. The 80’ by 120’ area has new sod and a rock bordered pool.

The use of captive panthers for interpretive public education is a recognized goal of the Florida Panther Recovery Plan.

Lowry Park Zoo has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and FWC to provide veterinary support for Florida panthers. To date they have provided rehabilitative support for four kittens and eight adult panthers. Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park previously housed FP79, aka “Don Juan.” Yuma appears to be ready to serve as ambassador for Florida panthers. Florida residents may contribute to these conservation efforts by purchasing a “Protect the Panther” license plate.

Notices and Links

Some of the Publications Covering Yuma:

February 20, Naples Daily News, “**Week-old ailing panther kitten rescued in Collier**”, <http://www.naplesnews.com/tablet-showcase/beaches-and-outdoors/week-old-ailing-panther-kitten-rescued-collier>

April 2, Naples Daily News, “**Abandoned panther kitten thriving at Tampa zoo**”, <http://www.naplesnews.com/breaking-ground/environment/abandoned-panther-kitten-thriving-tampa-zoo>

Lowry Park Zoo, “**Rescued Florida Panther Kitten**”, <http://www.lowryparkzoo.com/panther/>

Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, “**Yuma's New Home**” <https://www.flickr.com/photos/myfwcmedia/sets/72157646641638876/>

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation videos and pictures,
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RralPWUfE6w>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofr-Y76iUP0>
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/myfwcmedia/sets/72157640328910843/with/12288130703/>

Other Florida Panther Related Links:

4th Annual Florida Panther Festival “November 15th, and 16th at North Collier Regional Park.” <http://www.floridapantherfestival.com/>

Florida Panther Update Partnership This newsletter is made possible through the efforts of the following agencies:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) www.floridapanthernet.org

Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) www.nps.gov/bicy

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR) www.fws.gov/floridapanther



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