

In and Around Naples
A Series of Presentations
for the Collier County Library
by Paul Pacter

Florida Panther
National Wildlife Refuge

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www.paulvisits.com

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
Website:
www.fws.gov/refuge/florida_panther/
Where: 21 miles east of Naples. I-75 just north of State Road 29 (Exit 80).
Get There: I-75 Exit 80 (SR-29) 21 miles east of Collier Blvd. Then ½ mile north on SR-29.
Admission: Free.
When: Daily sunrise to sunset.




What: 26,400-acre refuge to protect panther habitat. Public access only on two trails in one corner. 12-16 Florida panthers den and roam there. Plus others, alligators, birds.

Two Hiking Trails:

- Small Loop: 0.3 miles.
- Outer Loop: 1.3 miles.

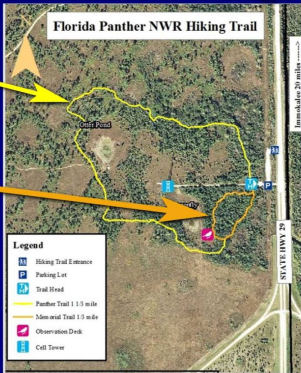
There are only around 250 Florida panthers in the wild in all of Florida. (In 1970s there were only 20.)



Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

Outer Loop:
 "Panther Trail"
 1-1/3 mile.

Small Loop:
 "Memorial Trail"
 1/3 mile.



Florida Panther Info

Note: I have never seen one in the wild.

- Either same as or subspecies of North American cougar.
- Outside Florida called mountain lion, puma, cougar.
- It is not a bobcat.
- Florida's state animal.

Color:

- **At Birth:** Tan with black spots. Blue eyes.
- **Adult:** Spots fade by age 6 months.
 - Coat becomes completely tan.
 - Underbelly is a creamy white.
 - Black tips on the tail and ears.
 - Sides of muzzle blackish.
 - Yellow eyes.
 - Tail almost as long as its body.



Adult



Panther Kittens



Number of Florida Panthers:

- 1900: Estimated 500.
- 1967: Not more than 20 adults due to hunting and loss of habitat.
- 1967: “Threatened with extinction”.
- 1973: US “endangered species” list.
- 1995: Breeding program with 8 female cougars from Texas. Result: steady increase in numbers.
- Today: Around 250 wild in Florida.
- Current status: “Endangered”.



Size:

- Adult male: 100–160 pounds.
- Adult female: 64–115 pounds.
- Length: 5.9 to 7.2 feet, nose to tip of tail.
- Shoulder height: 24–28 inches.



Sounds:

- Cannot roar.
- Instead makes distinct sounds that include: Whistles, chirps, growls, hisses, and purrs.

Mating:

- Mating season: October to March.
- Age: Female 2 yrs. Male 3 yrs.
- Gestation: 90 to 95 days.
- Litter: 1 to 3 kittens.
- Kittens: Blind (eyes shut) for 2 to 3 weeks. Then eyes open.
- Weaned to meat: After 2 to 3 months.

After Mating:

- Panthers are polygamous.
- A week or so after mating, father moves on to solitary life until next mating season.
- Mother raises kittens.
- Kittens stay with mother 18-24 months.
- Then mother moves on to solitary life or another mating partner.

Lifespan:

- 15 to 20 years in the wild.

Diet:

- Carnivore (meat eater).
- Opportunistic.
- 90% of diet is wild boar, white-tailed deer, raccoon, and armadillo.
- Occasionally rabbits, rats, birds, gators.
- Also will prey on domesticated farm animals, as well as dogs and cats.
- **Adults need to consume equivalent of about 1 deer or hog per week.**

Habitat:

- Both wetlands and grasslands.
- Prefer dense vegetation such as forested areas, pinelands, tropical hardwood hammocks, and mixed freshwater swamp forests.
- **Dense vegetation enables them to hide and stalk their prey.**

Range:

- Mainly in southwestern Florida.
- Territorial and solitary (except when mating).
- Male home range: **200-250 sq mi.**
Female: **70-80 sq mi.**
- Home range marked by claw marks and urine or feces. Tells others: stay away.
- **Panthers wander 15-20 miles a day searching for food. Can swim. Keen sense of smell.**

Hunting:

- Begin hunting with mother age 2 months.
- Hunt on their own starting 18 months to 2 years.
- Creep up as close to prey as possible and launch a short spring ambush.
- Bites the animal's neck and cuts the spinal cord, or suffocation.
- Most active at night.

Threats to Panthers:

- Loss of habitat due to development.
- Habitat fragmentation and degradation due to roads, fences, development.
- Vehicular collisions.
- Territorial aggression from other panthers.

Causes of Deaths of Panthers

Vehicles: 59%. Mostly Collier and Lee Counties

Killed by Other Panthers: 16%.

Diseases and Other

Known Causes: 12%.

Unknown Causes: 13%.

66% of panthers killed in vehicle collisions are 3 years old or less.

Are Panthers a Danger to Humans?

- Never a reported attack of a human by a panther in Florida.
- Yes - incidents with cougars outside Florida.
- If you encounter one:
 - **Do not run or turn your back.**
 - **Stand tall. Look panther in eye.**
 - **If attacked, fight but do not turn your back.**

Area Zoos with Florida Panthers:

- Naples Zoo. **Athena - Next Slide.**
- Homosassa Springs **Slide After Wildlife State Park. That**
- Palm Beach Zoo.
- Zoo Miami.
- Zoo Tampa at Lowry Park.



Athena at Naples Zoo



Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park

Now, let's take a look at Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.

21 miles east of Naples at I-75 Exit 80 (State Road 29).

Free. Daily sunrise to sunset.



Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

What: 26,400-acre refuge to protect panther habitat. Public access only on two trails in one corner. 12-16 Florida panthers live and roam there. Fox, bobcat, wild turkey, alligators, birds, and other species live there.

Trail Loop: 1.2 miles

- Small Loop: 0.3 miles
- Outer Loop: 1.2 miles

There are only around 20 Florida panthers in the wild in all of Florida. (In 1970s there were only 20.)

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

Outer Loop: "Panther Trail" 1.2 miles

Small Loop: "Memorial Trail" 0.3 miles

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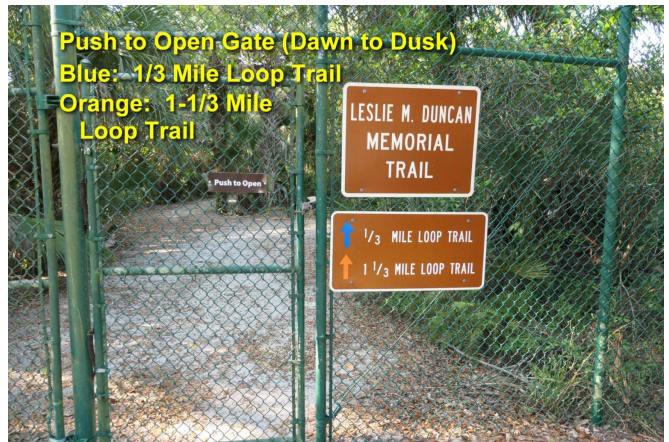
Where: www.fws.gov/nwr/florida_panther

Where: 20 miles east of Naples, 1.75 miles north of State Road 29 (Exit 80).

Call Them: 1-75 Exit 80 (SR-29) 21 miles east of Naples, Fla. Then 11 miles north on SR-29.

Admission: Free.

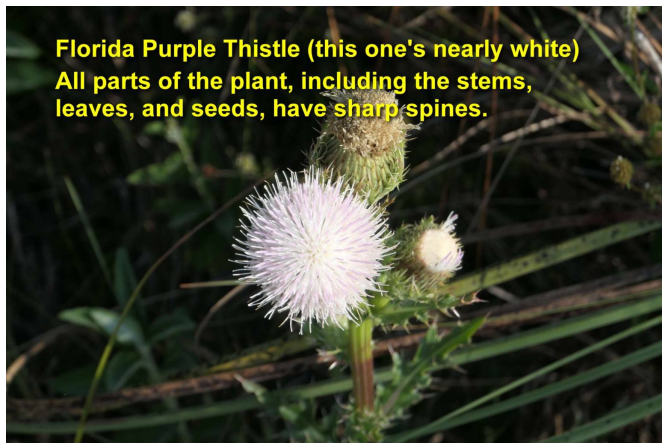
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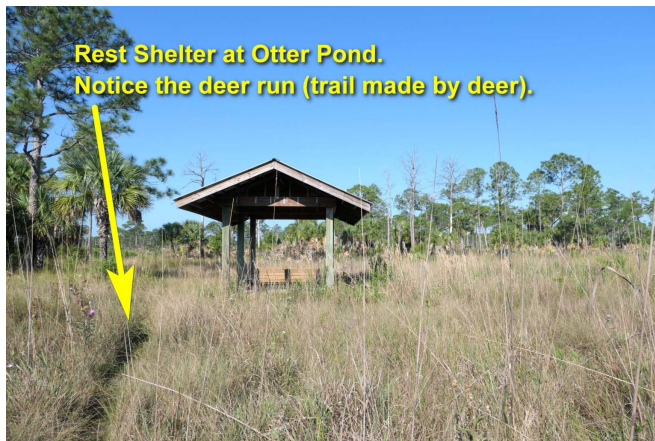




Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
This is called Otter Pond.
But no otters and no water in sight (March 2020).



Rest Shelter at Otter Pond.
Notice the deer run (trail made by deer).



Eastern Lubber Grasshopper
aka Florida Lubber
Up to 3 inches long.
Sometimes black.
Non-flying.
Slow-moving.
Eat foliage.
Harmless to humans.



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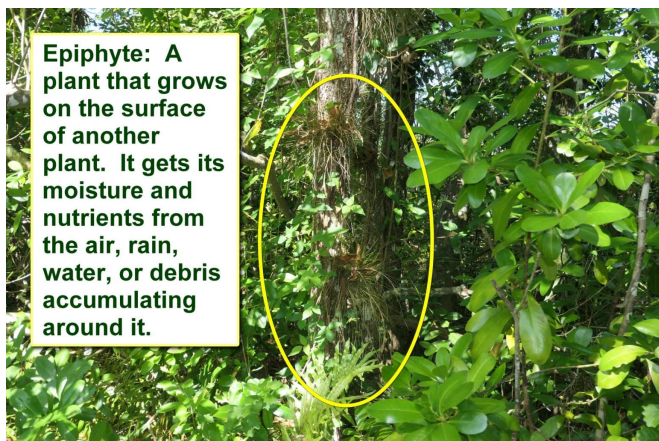
Coral Bean Shrub
aka Cherokee Bean



Coral Bean Shrub
Some medicinal use.
Not edible.



Epiphyte: A plant that grows on the surface of another plant. It gets its moisture and nutrients from the air, rain, water, or debris accumulating around it.



Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
Don't forget to close the gate when you leave.

