



Panther Update

November, 2007

Big Cat Field Stories

ASK A BIOLOGIST:

How Do Captured Panthers Recover From Anesthesia?

by Mark Lotz, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Panther capture season starts up again this month and continues through March or April 2008. The FWC team operates under strict safety protocols during captures. Because of these protocols, and dedicated adherence to them, the team has achieved an excellent safety record. Although the panther is a hardy animal, coming out of anesthesia can put it in a compromising position.

We initially dart the treed panther with a combination of ketamine/xylezine. Once the panther is on the ground we use Propofol intravenously to keep it under. Propofol is used because it is fast acting. And, when the flow is stopped, the subject recovers in seconds. Once captured, the panther is usually out for about 1.5 - 2 hours. By this time the Ketamine, the main drug used to anesthetize the panther, has worn off. So, while the panther is still drugged, we pack our gear and, if the buggy is parked too near, move it some distance away so that when we start the ignition to leave, the panther will not startle. The rest of the crew then exits the area while Dr. Cunningham (veterinarian) stays behind to watch the panther.

Once we are clear, he removes the IV and watches the cat to make sure it is recovering normally. During the first 10-15 minutes the cat will still be groggy, but Cunningham waits until it is able to keep its head up. This is to ensure that, if it does crawl off and find a puddle (although, when water is nearby the panther is always moved a safe distance away from it) the panther will be able to keep its head up instead of falling face first into the water and taking a gulp. During that groggy stage the panther will just lay there looking around, undoubtedly feeling woozy (anybody who's had to recover from anesthesia can probably relate).



FP 131 at The Refuge, Not Fully Recovered but Trying to Get Away
by Mark Lotz



143 Pound Male FP137 Waking up From Anesthesia, Assisted by Mark Lotz
Photo by Dave Onorato

Any little noise spooks them in this state and they try to run away. But often their legs are not ready for this, so they end up lunging forward a few steps before their legs give out causing them to fall to the ground.

Sometimes their own actions will then spook them further so they'll lunge again. This will go on a couple of times before the panther tires to a point where it just lays down to rest. But another snap of the twig, cough, or sound of a bag being zipped will start the cycle all over again. For this reason it's best that only one person stay behind. Also, while the panther is lunging, it can run into trees or just straight into palmetto fronds or stems. If this happens there is a risk of eye injury (our main worry) or general knocks on the head and legs. Like people, panthers react to and recover from anesthesia differently. Some have gotten up and walked off minutes after the Propofol was stopped. Others have laid there and slept, taking longer to recover. Dr. Cunningham closely monitors these sleepy panthers and will make them move to observe their condition for any problems. The following day we check the panther's location. Invariably the cat has moved off from the capture site; sometimes merely a quarter mile, sometimes several miles. This information gets recorded on our capture data sheet.

Trapped Panther Herded to Safety

Trapped between the fences on Corkscrew Rd. near Alico close to a wildlife underpass, Saturday evening, *October 27*, a panther was running back and forth along the fence, occasionally hiding out in nearby culverts. Passing motorists reported the situation around 7pm which sent biologists, Mark Lotz, Marc Criffield, and Kathleen Smith rushing to the scene. It was dark when they arrived and the panther was still in the culvert which measured 32 inches high and 52 inches wide. Other wildlife officials were also present.

A hole had been cut in the fence about 15 feet to the right of the culvert entrance. Everyone present organized to stand at various positions around the culvert and fence in an attempt to "herd" the panther to freedom. Some people stood along the fence on either side of the hole creating a barrier for the panther in order to funnel the cat through the opening.

Once everyone was in position, Marc Criffield crawled into the culvert from the other side to flush the panther out. He moved cautiously, not wanting to spook the panther and make it dart out, but rather tried to gently and slowly coax it out so the cat would

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find its way to the hole in the fence. The panther then emerged from the culvert and stood at the entrance briefly (presumably sizing up the situation).

After several moments, Marc tapped the side of the culvert causing the panther to lope straight to the hole and through. Biologists present believed it was a young female, roughly 2 years old. The fence hole was promptly patched and the DOT notified for a proper fix.



Cat in a Culvert by Mark Lotz
Red glow is a flare in place to keep the panther from escaping

In the daylight of the next morning, Mark Lotz and Roy McBride (who tracks panthers) returned to the site to determine how the panther got into the situation. Basically, she walked through an opening where fencing was under construction and crossed to the other side of the road where she hit a solid stretch of fence and continued along it until finally taking refuge in the culvert. The construction should be complete now and the area safer for panthers. Fences have to end somewhere so the risk of a panther getting in between them can never be totally eliminated.

Refuge Kittens Lost

Biologists suspect that FP107 has lost her kittens that were born last month (see October Update). This was expected based mainly on her past history (she has never raised a litter to dispersal age). Her attendance at her den was being monitored, and she had not returned for about a week. So, FWC biologists went out to investigate the den site on *October 25*. No sign of kittens were found in the old den site. The crew scoured the entire area (pine island surrounded by cypress) to look for any other den sites, to no avail. Panther mothers typically shift the den every week or so as the old den site gets dirty or the ground becomes too muddy, normally just a few feet at a time. To discover a new den, biologists positioned in the old site, can look around and usually see a tunnel through the vegetation that leads to the next chamber. FP107 had moved the den once, but that was the only additional site they found. Sadly, no kittens or remains were in either location.

What Humans Are Doing

The Wings of Hope Website is up and running. There you can visit the **Panther Posse**, which receives support from Refuge Friends, and involves 300 university students each semester working together to teach elementary school students about the Florida Panther, its habitat and water conservation. Wings of Hope is funded by South Florida Water Management District's "Grant of Hope".

<http://www.fgcu.edu/cas/wingsofhope>

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recently completed in *October* its **Annual Report on the Research and Management of Florida Panthers: 2006-2007**. A must read for panther buffs: <http://myfwc.com/panther/news/reports.html>
Or, if you are short on time, check out the **Summary**. You can peruse information about three panthers captured on the Refuge, FP 113, 131, and 154 and find the photo of 154's teeth! <http://myfwc.com/panther/news/summary.html>

Naples Daily News published a fascinating three part series on the Florida panther, *October 20, 21, and 22*. Click here to read Part III "Speeding Kills" and reference the first two articles. http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2007/oct/22/speeding_kills/

What You Can Do This Month

Purchase raffle tickets for artwork by Clyde Butcher and others. Drawing will be held December 7, 2007 at the conclusion of the Exotics Species Workshop for Southwest Florida. All proceeds go to the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. Go to http://www.floridapanther.org/panther_store_auction.html or call Takako on 239.353.8442 for tickets or to volunteer to help with the raffle.

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