

Editorial Opinion

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Guest commentary

Finding meaning in a panther video: We must expand habitat

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Last week, a guest at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary had the experience of a lifetime — and it was all captured on video.

You may have seen the remarkable footage online. In the video, you can see an endangered Florida panther walking on Corkscrew's famous boardwalk until he turns the corner and, in an unexpected reversal of roles, appears to panic at the sight of a human. The startled cat speeds up, racing past the videographer's leg. It's a classic hold-your-breath-moment if there ever was one.

The reality behind the highly entertaining video is a sober and uncertain one. The young cat will likely remain on the



Jason Lauritsen

move with no home range of his own until he reaches maturity and can defend his territory. In his search, he will be forced to skirt residential communities and new developments, avoid dominant male panthers in their prime, and dodge speeding cars on increasingly congested highways. Last year we broke the record for panthers killed by cars at 26 individuals. That is a shocking number given that state biologists estimate that only 180 or so of these magnificent animals remain.

We have a collective obligation to conserve habitat at a meaningful scale, mindful of the threats and befitting the needs of wide-ranging animals like panthers.

To prevent any further population declines of this iconic Florida species, Audubon scientists, policy advocates and volunteers are working alongside other conservation partners to

protect and restore the habitat that panthers need to survive.

We reach across the fence to work with our neighbors because any meaningful solution demands it. Our 13,000 acres are not nearly enough. Just one adult male panther has a home range up to 200 square miles, nearly 10 times the size of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Like the Florida panther, Corkscrew Swamp and the Everglades cannot survive without help. It's now up to us to restore and protect the surrounding watersheds and the full range of unique habitats found in southern Florida.

Many large conservation areas, like Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, Everglades National Park and Big Cypress Preserve, must also be linked together by protected corridors to achieve maximum ecological results. Unfortunately, increasing development pressures now threaten to limit or foreclose these links and undo habitat protection and restoration goals.

State, local and federal governments, plus rural communities and ranchers, must work

together to protect what's left of the panther's natural habitat and expand it north — before it's too late. The options include land acquisition, sustainably planned and located human communities, and — perhaps most critically — incentives for landowners and ranchers to “grow panthers.”

A good example of how to incentivize landowners to grow panthers is called Habitat Conservation Planning (HCP), which is a federal Endangered Species Act program. HCPs seek to balance all the human and habitat issues in a specific area for a sustainable outcome for imperiled species.

Currently, there is a new HCP being developed in eastern Collier County on 152,000 acres north of the Florida Panther Refuge. Still in draft form, the Eastern Collier Multispecies HCP would mandate that each new development project use only old farm fields and sets aside about two times more preserved and restored prime habitat.

The aim of this HCP is to protect panthers, wood storks and

many other imperiled Everglades species, so Audubon and our allies are engaged directly with the landowners and federal agencies to produce the most protective and sustainable plan. We firmly believe the HCP process and other incentive-based collaborations hold great promise for the future of panthers and the Western Everglades/Corkscrew Swamp landscape.

Thinking in legacy terms, our children and grandchildren would be best served if we took the naturalist Aldo Leopold's conservation maxim to heart: “To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.”

It is well within our grasp to conserve the ecological cog that is the Florida panther.

There is a public scoping meeting for this Eastern Collier HCP on April 12 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the University of Florida IFAS/County Extension Auditorium next to the Collier County Fairgrounds.

More information is online: www.easterncollierHCPeis.com

On this date

Today is the 96th day of 2016 and the 17th day of spring.

Today's history: In 1792, George Washington cast the first presidential veto, striking down a bill that concerned representative apportionment among the states.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order establishing the Civilian Conservation Corps.

In 1955, Winston Churchill resigned as prime minister of Great Britain due to failing health.

In 2010, an explosion at the Upper Big Branch coal mine in West Virginia killed 29 miners.

Today's birthdays: Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), philosopher; Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), writer/educator; Spencer Tracy (1900-67), actor; Bette Davis (1908-89), actress; Gregory Peck (1916-2003), actor; Colin Powell, Army general/diplomat, is 79; Mitch Pileggi, actor, is 64; Pharrell Williams, rapper/producer, is 43; Hayley Atwell, actress, is 34.

Today's fact: Easter Island, located in the southeastern Pacific Ocean, was given its name by its first recorded European visitor, Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen, who first encountered it on Easter Sunday, on this day in 1722.

Today's quote: “I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.”

— Booker T. Washington, “Up From Slavery”

Today's number: 2.43 — length (in miles) of the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge, linking the city of Kobe to Awaji Island in Japan. The bridge, which has the longest main span of any suspension bridge in the world, opened to traffic on this day in 1998.

Bible quote: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” — 1 Peter 5:8

LETTERS

E.R. Russell, *Naples*

Where did America go?

Of all the comments in the political arena in recent years, the most accurate was by Professor Jonathan Gruber when he said Americans are stupid.

A lot of young people are supporting declared socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders because of his free college and free health care ideas. Hello, nothing is really free. If these young folks get jobs, they will wind up paying for all this “free stuff.”

The Republican establishment is trying to take stupid to a new level. All their anti-Donald Trump efforts are going to ensure a Hillary Clinton win in November.

As for Trump, he is an enigma. His supporters have no idea what his real policies would be if elected. The Clinton supporters are also clueless. African-Americans have made no progress under President Barack Obama and she promises more of the same.

A Quinnipiac University poll asking one word to describe Clinton noted “liar” as the most frequent response followed by “dishonest” and “untrustworthy.” In spite of this, many Democrats still plan to vote for her, really. If one cannot believe much of what she says, on what basis are they planning to vote for her?

Here in Florida, the Republicans are still voting against the will of the people on the gambling issue and getting away with it year after year.

As I watch all this, I do not know whether to laugh or cry. What I do know is America is toast. It is only a matter of time before things get ugly.

Walt Kozlowski, *Naples*

A question

Is it possible that the president's attendance at a baseball game in Cuba after the Brussels terrorist attack could be considered an “obamanation?”

On another matter, I was born and raised in Wisconsin and voted there until I retired to Florida. Now, Wisconsin, the birthplace of the Republican Party, has a chance to show the nation the way to hopefully eliminate a Republican candidate for president who is clearly unfit for the job.

My neighbors in Florida unfortunately got it wrong recently in our own primary. I hope they have kept up with the foibles of their choice of candidates recently. Call them “Cheeseheads”

if you want, but Wisconsinites know the candidate who is “cutting cheese” every time he opens his mouth!

H.H. Hermann, *Naples*

Power play

I am personally acquainted with retired teachers and professors of education living here in Naples whose careers were often engaged in battles that sought to end teacher tenure; to seize control of classrooms from professional educators; to break teachers' unions; to privatize public education through charter schools; to eliminate critical thinking from schools; to generate profits for information and testing firms, and to manage the population in a fractious society divided by race and class.

Such systemic aims might serve to explain the political efforts of a group of ideologues to gain control of the Collier County School Board.

Rather than seeking to address educational needs and inequalities, the answers advanced by the new political juggernaut have been to attack something as beneficial as Blue Zones to promote better health for young people.

Those opposing any efforts to improve the health of students have as their objective the educational system being given over to private and charter schools.

As they prepare to endorse reactionary candidates for School Board in Collier County, they latch on to issues like Blue Zones for healthy eating. Part of their absurdity is that it is a conspiracy fostered by the United Nations to undermine our society by encouraging healthy eating habits.

What distorted mind can accuse a man like Roger Baldwin, who received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1981, of promoting communism? He was personally selected by Gen. Douglas MacArthur to integrate civil liberties in postwar Japan.

Any reader of these letters should recognize anti-democratic power plays.

Resistance to these nefarious forces is no longer an option. It is a necessity.

Bernice Richmond, *Naples*

Remember this

Firearms are not life-threatening. They are life-affirming. Maybe that is the attraction.

While at The Alamo gun range in Naples, in a chance conversa-

tion a woman told me she was afraid of guns even though her father had owned guns and her husband and her female friends went to the range to shoot. She said she sat and watched them, being too afraid herself.

I asked her if she drove a car. She answered, “Yes.” I told her that hurtling down a street in a ton of metal was dangerous, yet she had mastered that. A car can serve — or kill. It can be a wonderful thing that can get you from here to there, once you respect its nature, control its function, obey traffic rules and the laws of physics.

I said she was missing an opportunity and that it was a shame not to go that one, last step. It had been harder for me. I do not come from “gun people.”

A gun is merely a tool made by and for the hand of man. In form and function, it is sculpted to fit and serve no other being. It is an expression of a civilization that values life and sanctions meeting force with opposing force or to provide nourishment to sustain that life.

I do not understand killing animals for sport. Making things dead is not my idea of entertainment. But learning to master a tool so exquisitely crafted that it is an extension of human consciousness, affirming its right to life, is beautiful.

As my teacher in class at The Alamo eloquently said, “Shoot to live, not to kill.”

Cassidy Sparks, *Fort Myers*

Stop racing

I am writing to generate support for the editorial headlined “Greyhound injury reporting a first step, but long way to go” that ran in the Naples Daily News. As stated in the editorial, commercial dog racing is illegal in 39 states, and Florida is behind in this trend.

Florida has taken a step forward with reporting greyhound injuries. I am saddened to hear that 200 greyhounds were injured in the state from 2008 to 2015, including at least 137 deaths of the greyhounds. These numbers are not going to stop just because they have to report the injured, and you can't even be sure they are going to report them all.

I agree that Florida needs to take a step in banning commercial greyhound racing; dogs' lives matter, too. One hundred live races each year is absurd. These dogs are innocent animals that don't get to choose if they want to race or not. The dogs get injured and can possibly die

from these races.

Florida needs to follow the lead of other states and stop greyhound racing.

Alexandra Wildey, *Naples*

Worth support

Thanks to the Collier County Master Gardeners and University of Florida Extension for presenting another interesting and informative 10-week program.

Chris Morton, co-chair, and others once again provided speakers who imparted vital information so relevant to our area gardens and sea coast. Several friends and I have attended for at least nine years and each year and session has inspired us to make positive changes in our landscapes.

We attended the recent agricultural tour and visited several amazing agribusinesses in Immokalee. Included was BHN Seeds, Inyoni Organic Farm and Oakes Farms the Nursery and others. We were treated to a healthy, delicious lunch and tour at Oakes Farms. Alfie Oakes' history and vision is amazing.

Thanks to the Collier County UF/IFAS Extension and Gene McAvoy for a fascinating day. We are so fortunate to have a most active county Extension and Master Gardeners group here in Collier County.

Pat Peel, *Port Carling, Ontario*

Have to disagree

A slanted letter to the editor indeed from Naples visitor John Currey of St. Catharines, Ontario.

I wish to take exception to his viewpoint on OHIP, our Ontario health care coverage.

As a recently retired registered nurse in the emergency room, I have witnessed excellent health care and as a patient myself have received all I have required through my family doctor for a few medical problems I have had.

And yes, I am a liberal.

Nancy Frees, *Naples*

New low

I must say I think you have reached a new low with the story about the accused Dr. Teresa Sievers' killing suspects' commissary.

What was the point of your story? This did nothing to inform or educate the public and belonged in the National Enquirer.

Guest commentary policy

A guest commentary can be 750 words or less on a topical subject. Authors must have considerable experience, public involvement or expertise in the subject matter. A guest commentary may be returned to the author with a recommendation to resubmit it as a Letter to the Editor within the guidelines for letters.

It is recommended that authors receive pre-clearance before submission; call 239-435-3457.