



The Florida Panther: Life And Death Of A Vanishing Carnivore

David Maehr

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When the first field study of the Florida panther took place in 1973, so little was known about the animal that many scientists believed it was already extinct. During more extensive research conducted from 1981 to 1986, panthers were proven to exist, but the handful of senile, anemic, and parasite-infested specimens that were captured indicated a grim future. During those early years a remarkably enduring image of the panther was born, and despite voluminous data gathered over the next decade that showed the panther to be healthy, long-lived, and reproducing, that earlier image has yet to be dispelled.

For nine years, biologist David S. Maehr served as project leader of the Florida Panther Study Project, helping to gather much of the later, surprisingly positive data. In *The Florida Panther*, he presents the first detailed portrait of the animal—its biology, natural history, and current status—and a realistic assessment of its prospects for survival.

Maehr also provides an intriguing look at the life and work of a field biologist: how captures are made, the intricacies of radio-telemetry tracking, the roles of various team members. He describes the devastating intrusion of politics into scientific work, as he discusses the widespread problems caused by the failure of remote and ill-informed managers to provide needed support and to communicate effectively to the public the goals and accomplishments of the scientists. He examines controversial efforts to establish a captive breeding program and to manipulate the Florida panther's genetic stock with the introduction of relatives from west Texas.

Protection of high-quality habitat, much of it in the hands of private landowners, is the key to the long-term survival of the Florida panther. Unless agency decision makers and the public are aware of the panther's true situation, little can be done to save it. This book will play a vital role in correcting widespread misconceptions about the panther's current condition and threats to its survival.



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