

# HIGHLANDS TODAY

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INFORMING TODAY, SHAPING TOMORROW



CHRISTY SWIFT

Lexi Siegle catches a katydid at Archbold's summer camp. In addition to her Internship, Siegle also volunteers at the theater summer camp at Circle Theatre one evening a week.

## Happy camper

### Archbold intern caught the science bug at the summer camp there

BY CHRISTY SWIFT

Highlands Today correspondent

Sometimes our early experiences profoundly shape the person we become. This has been the case for 19-year-old Lexi Siegle, whose childhood visits to Archbold Biological Station in Venus prompted her to want to become a scientist.

Siegle's career started at the age of 7 when she became a camper at Archbold's summer camp. The field research station serves as a living laboratory in one of the world's most ancient habitats, and kids get exposed to real scientists and scientific research while also learning about the Florida scrub habitat.

"The theme for my very first camp was ant lions," Siegle recalled. "Each of us



Campers pet a Florida pine snake around Lexi Siegle's neck. The 19-year-old, who attended Archbold Biological Station's summer camps, is now doing a full-time summer internship there and helping out at this year's summer camp.

## Camper

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caught our own ant lion. We had our own cup and we did a whole bunch of experiments. We caught ants and fed them. We put colored wood chips in (the nests) overnight and when we came back we saw that they were flipped out," she explained.

Siegle, who moved to Lake Placid when she was 4, never missed a summer all through her elementary school years, then became a camp counselor for several summers after that. This year, while studying marine science at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers, she is working a full-time summer internship at the station. Her research project involves apple snails.

"The premise is that I am attempting to see which species will eat the most vegetation in a certain amount of time," said



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**Lexi Siegle catches a katydid at Archbold's summer camp. In addition to her internship, Siegle also volunteers at the theater summer camp at Circle Theatre one evening a week.**

Siegle, who is comparing the native Florida apple snail with the larger, invasive island apple snail.

Another of her responsibilities is helping camp coordinator Dustin Angell

to run the same summer camp that she enjoyed during her childhood and teenage years. From June 1 through this Friday, Siegle has been leading camp activities, inventing games,

developing PowerPoint presentations and spearheading a field journal initiative with kids ages 7-12. She has a reputation among this year's group as being the best frog catch-

er, and at the end of one session she wasn't afraid to capture a biting katydid with her bare hands.



**In her role,** laid-back, smiling Siegle gets to foster some of the same experiences that sparked her early interest in science, such as learning how to properly collect scientific data (the kids record daily temperature, humidity and rainfall from one of Archbold's weather stations) and how technology is used in research (such as cameras that record animal movement and devices that help track gopher tortoises).

Siegle remembered memorizing bird calls during her time as a camper, and has upped the ante on this year's group by designing a game that teaches scientific nomenclature, having kids match the Latin names of local plants and animals to their English translations.

Once a week in the evening, Siegle also helps out at the Circle Theatre's summer camp for youths as a stage manager. Siegle, whose parents Amanda and Chris Bates are theater lovers, grew up around the stage, but said she's definitely a "behind the scenes" person. Her parents supported her love for animals by sending her to Archbold camp, she said.

Siegle said she plans to go into scientific research, although she's not sure exactly what kind, just that it will involve marine animals. At some point she'd also like to work in environmental education.

As for her time at the far end of her Archbold summer camp career, Siegle said she hopes that the campers will take away "first and foremost, a love of the Florida scrub."

"If more kids know about it and really like the Florida scrub, it has a better chance of being protected," she said.