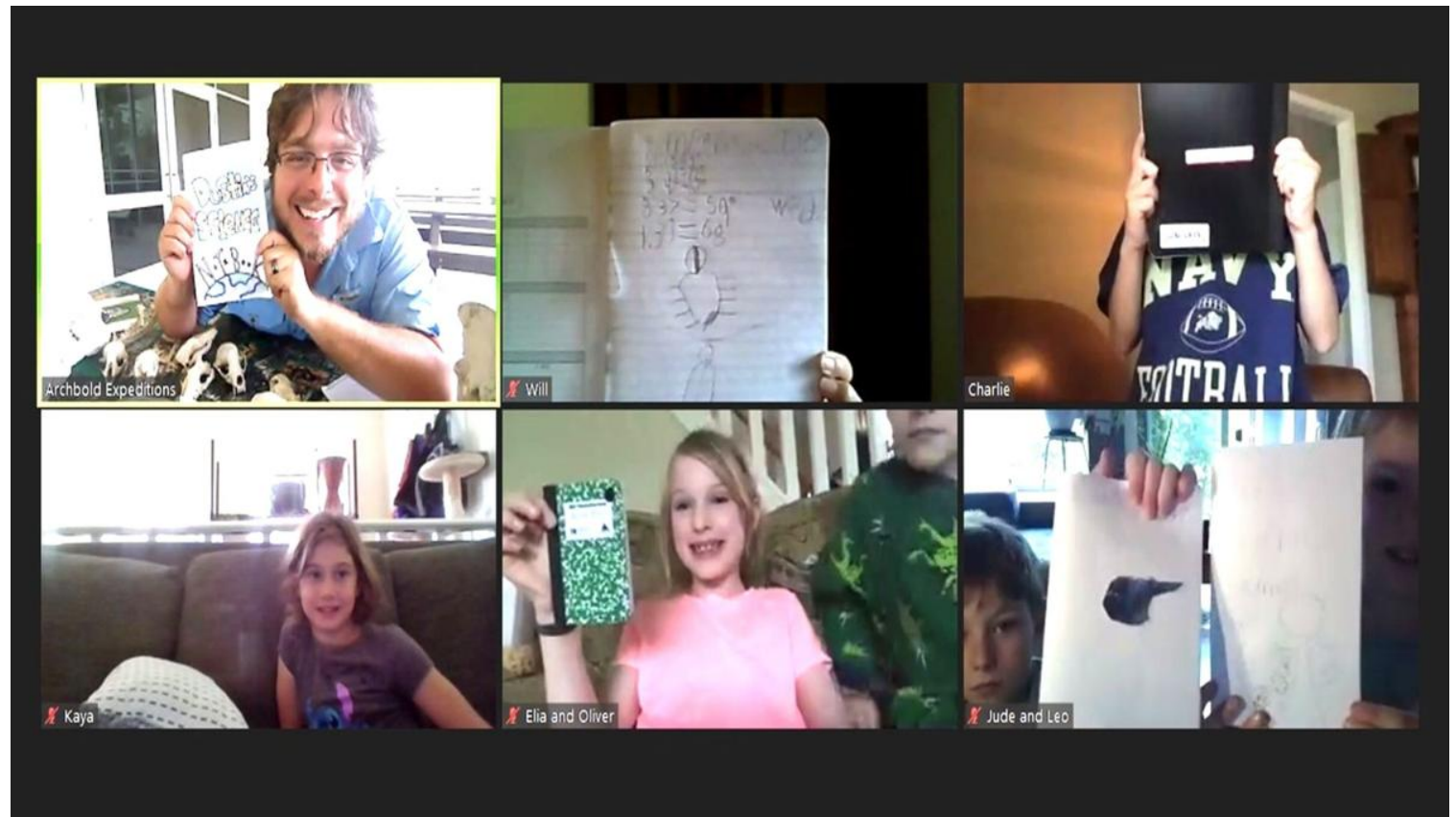


[https://www.midfloridanewspapers.com/highlands\\_news-sun/around\\_town/backyard-science-for-all-ages/article\\_b8d93f88-c544-11ea-8ef9-87502fcfd34d.html](https://www.midfloridanewspapers.com/highlands_news-sun/around_town/backyard-science-for-all-ages/article_b8d93f88-c544-11ea-8ef9-87502fcfd34d.html)

## Backyard science for all ages

By Special to Highlands News-Sun Courtesy Archbold Biological Station  
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Archbold's virtual campers hold up their science notebooks.

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Quarantines, closed summer camps and activities, canceled travel plans, social distancing...parents are all too familiar with the struggle to maintain some normalcy this summer. With children out of school, many are probably a bit stir-crazy and parents are wondering what to do with these kids all day. Or maybe you are in need of some activities for yourself.

In June, Archbold Biological Station's Virtual Ecology Summer Camp focused on campers doing at-home science projects that use household supplies. Now that all the camp sessions are over, Archbold has opened up the camp website for the public. The link can be found on Archbold's website or by visiting

'sites.google.com/view/archboldvirtualcamp.' You can now enjoy the same fun backyard science projects at your own pace. The website includes simple directions, tutorial videos, photos of campers-in action and even educational nature videos made by teen camp volunteers.

Archbold's Director of Education, Dustin Angell, encourages people of all ages to visit the website and try the projects, saying, "Becoming better acquainted with the weather, wildlife and habitats in your neighborhood is an enjoyable pursuit for families and individuals that benefits their health and well being. Have fun with these projects and customize them to your needs and interests." The first step is to create a science notebook—use a small notebook or make your own book from paper to record observations and ideas.

One activity is weather monitoring: observe the weather at the same time each day, include the date and time to log in your science notebook, and describe or draw what kind of weather you see and feel. Is it raining, cloudy, or sunny? Does the air smell like it will rain soon? Does it feel hot and humid, windy, or cool? If you have a thermometer you can record the temperature each day, or find the temperature using an app on your phone or computer. Can you predict the weather after a few days of careful observation?

For those who love to examine live animals, a pitfall trap is a fun backyard activity. Dig a small hole in a shady location, and place a plastic cup inside (be sure to poke some holes in the bottom of the cup for drainage!). Check the trap at least once a day to see what kind of insects you caught, note them in your science notebook, and release them. Draw pictures of your bugs, or take photos to help identify them using the internet or a field guide. Try putting the trap in different locations. Do you catch more bugs in one place versus another? Do you catch more bugs during the day or overnight? Do your observations about the bugs create a pattern that matches your weather observations?

A scavenger hunt can be a treat for all ages, and with a little imagination, you or your family can build a 'nature senses scavenger hunt' right in your own backyard! This activity is adapted from Nature Bridge, and it involves more than just seeing the items listed...some examples to get started in nature are:

**TOUCH:** find something smooth; something spiky; something squishy.

**SEE:** find something red; something left by an animal; something round.

**SMELL:** find something green—what does it smell like? Pick up a handful of dirt—what does it smell like?

Find something that smells sweet.

**HEAR:** how many different bird calls do you hear? Listen for something far away, something close by. Listen for water...if you can hear water, where is it?

Use these examples to build a scavenger hunt tailored to your own yard or neighborhood—what is interesting about the ecosystem where YOU live?

Spending more time at home is essential this summer, but not all of that time must be spent inside. Kids and adults of all ages can enjoy the outdoors while exercising their bodies and minds with a handy science notebook and a little imagination!