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Artist Deborah Mitchell visits Archbold

Archbold Biological Station

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Director of Avian Ecology, Dr. Reed Bowman, explains the importance of Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers and their habitat to Deborah Mitchell.

DUSTIN ANGELL PHOTO

Archbold recently received a special visit from renowned visual artist and environmental advocate, Deborah Mitchell. She arrived with a specific plan in mind: to showcase the Florida Scrub and Central Florida ranchlands, and to conduct film interviews with Archbold researchers to educate and promote conservation of Florida's rapidly declining wild spaces through her ongoing project, Wild Observations.

Her artwork has featured many elements of the Everglades ecosystem, including the Headwaters of the Everglades, the vast lands and waters draining south to Lake Okeechobee. A 2020 quote on Deborah's website from former Senator Bob Graham explains her role, "The salvation of the American Everglades is dependent of the awareness of Americans and citizens of the world to the global importance of the Glades and their willingness to support its restoration. Exposure through art has been and continues to be an important means of providing this awareness. Through her artistry Deborah Mitchell has devoted her talent and love of the Everglades to its restoration and has contributed to the goal being within a decade of realization. On behalf of this and future generations of world citizens, thank you Deborah for your contribution to our capacity to experience and be sustained by the unique qualities of a rejuvenated Everglades."

As part of her interest in the Headwaters, Deborah Mitchell is no stranger to Archbold. Her work features photo-based collages and paintings drawn from her travels in the Everglades and beyond.

Earlier this year, Mitchell's installation at the Miami International Airport, 'Wild Observations in American Flyways' included six pieces directly influenced by her time spent at Archbold. The exhibition, described as 'both an ecological and cultural study of observations occurring in our wild places' was on view from March 12-July 14, 2020 in the North Terminal, and now can be viewed at www.debmitchellart.com. When Archbold Biological Station safely reopens, it will host her exhibit for the public, free of charge.

During her latest visit in October, Mitchell focused on several endangered and threatened species of the Lake Wales Ridge. Over the course of two days, Mitchell and Archbold's Director of Education Dustin Angell documented birds including two woodpeckers, Florida Caracara, Florida Scrub-Jays, the flower Scrub Blazing Star, Ambrosia beetles, and the Rosemary Bald habitat. Mitchell and Angell recorded 17 topics ranging from ranchlands to museum type natural history collections and filmed special field interviews with Archbold researchers Dr. Mark Deyrup, Dr. Reed Bowman, and Dr. Hilary Swain.

Mitchell shared, "I believe that everything is connected, and am energized by participating in field research to understand the value of biodiversity and what it means in our changing world. My approach is both scientific and intuitive, meaning that the research is based on facts, but my interpretation is inspired by my relationship to the place."

Now back in her studio, Mitchell uses her journal sketches and photographs to begin the process of weaving art and science into a visual tapestry at once intricate and approachable to the public. Archbold is looking forward to hosting a virtual seminar by Mitchell, to share this and her other work at 3:30 p.m. on Jan. 28, 2021. More information about how to join this online seminar will be available at www.archbold-station.org.

Art and science may seem an unusual union at first glance but appealing to all sectors of the public audience is essential to spreading the science and conservation message. Archbold Executive Director Hilary Swain explains, "At Archbold, we are reaching new and wider audiences by partnering with artists as science and

conservation ambassadors. Deborah Mitchell is one such ambassador. Her careful attention to detail and her ability to meld complex scientific understanding with interpretation of nature is inspiring. Deborah infuses her artistic work with science, communicating the importance of sustaining our natural world.”

A Moody