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Archbold welcomes new research scientist and program

By Archbold Biological Station

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A Florida Panther is caught with a camera trap in located Highlands County.

CARLTON WARD PHOTO

Archbold Biological Station is expanding the scope of its current research. With the help of a generous donor, Archbold is re-establishing a predator-prey research program. This exciting partnership represents one of the steps Archbold is taking to help Keep Florida Wild. Led by conservation ecologist Joe Guthrie, the Predator-Prey Program will couple scientific research and conservation efforts to better understand and protect wide-

ranging species, such as the Florida Black Bear and the Florida Panther, and the habitats on which they rely. Guthrie has worked with Archbold in the past and returns in November from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in Virginia.

A native Kentuckian, Guthrie studied Florida Black Bears for his master's thesis at Archbold and on the surrounding conservation sites and working farms and ranches as a student of wildlife ecologist and conservationist Dr. David Maehr at the University of Kentucky.

Together, Maehr, Guthrie, and a team which included the late citrus grower and rancher, Mason Smoak, used GPS radio-collars to track the Highlands/Glades Black Bear population across the region, documenting their movements, habitat preferences, social interactions, reproduction, and food habits. Guthrie focused on the impacts of existing and newly planned roads on bear movements and mortality, to inform conservation needs across the South-Central Florida landscape.

The collaborative research inspired a series of conservation expeditions and documentary films highlighting efforts to connect, protect, and restore a 16 million-acre ecological wildlife corridor, known as the 'Florida Wildlife Corridor,' through Florida. The Expedition's 2019 film *The Last Green Thread* was featured at the D.C. Environmental Film Festival, Mountainfilm Festival in Telluride, CO, and at Archbold's February 'On the Lawn' event held in Lake Placid, FL. An upcoming Florida Wildlife Corridor short film, *The Wild Divide*, will premiere in January 2021 with a traveling roadshow across Florida, including a screening at Archbold. Guthrie's collaborations with the Florida Wildlife Corridor and the Florida Wild initiatives will continue through his research at the Station.

Guthrie shared, "I'm so excited to return to Highlands County, which holds such special meaning for me. This is a working landscape, which is where I've always wanted to be as a researcher. I can't wait to get back in the field and get to work."

The Predator-Prey Program will build on the extensive work of Archbold's founders. As the Station's first Director of Research, Dr. James N. Layne conducted studies on nearly all mammals known to Archbold, including the Florida Panther. Dr. Layne's archive, which is maintained at Archbold and includes his many published manuscripts, data, and field notes, forms an invaluable foundation for the new Predator-Prey Program.

In recent years, female Florida Panthers have been documented moving north of the Caloosahatchee River, a breakthrough long sought among biologists and conservationists concerned about the survival of the species. Archbold's scientists will utilize a variety of methods and technologies such as remote cameras to expand monitoring the community of mammal species, predators and prey, with the intent to study how changes in top carnivores might change the ecosystem.