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5th Annual Archbold Research Symposium goes virtual

Archbold Biological Station

Dec 16, 2020

**Plant Ecology Themes at Archbold 1988-2020:
Patterns, Progress, People, and Publications**

Eric S. Menges
Archbold Biological Station
December 2020

Photo: Reed Bowman

Dr. Eric Menges presents an overview of his program and research at Archbold. Dr. Menges retires in 2021 after 32 years with the Plant Ecology Program.

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On Thursday, Dec. 10, Archbold scientists, staff, colleagues, collaborators and the public gathered around their computer screens to attend the Fifth Annual Archbold Research Symposium virtually. Like so many gatherings in 2020, the Symposium needed to adapt and go virtual, or not be held this year. “Research at Archbold has never ceased. Our staff continued to collect data in the field under tight guidelines. Visiting scientists continued to travel to Archbold, practicing social distancing rules, as well as collaborating with staff remotely to gather the data they needed,” stated Executive Director Hilary Swain. “Archbold has taken the COVID-19 pandemic very seriously and taken all necessary safety precautions, sadly closing to the public, however we worked hard to safely continue our ongoing field research.”

This year's Symposium was no different than previous years, hosting a variety of presentations ranging from conservation of the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow, to a history of archived letters written by Richard Archbold during his worldwide expeditions, to monitoring plant diversity on Buck Island Ranch, Archbold's working cattle ranch. The internet audience learned about monitoring for a rare plant and efforts to de-list this unique Florida Golden Aster, about new collaborations examining implications of genetic isolation for recovery of Florida Scrub-Jays and other species in landscapes with habitat fragmentation, and ongoing work resolving taxonomy of the plethora of gall wasp species native to Florida and the southeastern USA.

"A benefit of the Symposium going virtual is we had the opportunity to hear from, but also reach so many people that many not have been able to attend in person in previous years," explained Archbold co-host Stephanie Koontz. "The Symposium is usually an all-day event, with speakers and attendees traveling to Archbold to attend and participate. But going virtual opened our message to so many more people curious about Archbold, our work, and conservation of Florida ecosystems."

In addition to many traditional, 15-minute, single project presentations, the Symposium welcomed a couple of longer sessions aimed to provide overviews from some of the core programs at Archbold. Plant Ecology Program Director, Dr. Eric Menges, gave a 30-year review of his program, highlighting trends in his research, long-term collaborations, and the multitude of next generation young scientists he has mentored over the years.

Dr. Betsie Rothermel, Director of the Restoration and Herpetology Program presented the history, ongoing, and future work on the Gopher Tortoise monitoring project on Archbold's Red Hill, one of the longest running monitoring projects on this threatened species. Dr. Reed Bowman, Director of the Avian Ecology Program introduced the audience to new technology, tracking the Florida Scrub-Jay to better understand social interactions within family groups and neighbors and how the surrounding landscape may influence these movements. Finally, Director of Education, Dustin Angell shared clips from many of his virtual activities developed and aired online over the past several months, and the challenges his program had to overcome to continue to share wild Florida in an isolated world.

"It is critical that Archbold continues to spread and share the message of science and conservation of Florida's native and working landscapes in a time when it is easy to be distracted, but while there is also a huge demand for quality online science," remarks Swain. "Hosting the Symposium this year demonstrated that Archbold is moving forward and will continue to do the hard work needed to protect these lands and waters for generations to come." If you missed, would like share, or re-watch any Symposium presentation, they can be found on Archbold's Facebook page and YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/ArchboldExpeditions/ videos.

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