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## Archbold's virtual school year

By ARCHBOLD BIOLOGICAL STATION

Dec 23, 2020



Screenshot of Archbold intern Margaret Davenport in a video welcoming visitors to Archbold's new education website.

COURTESY PHOTO

The Education Program at Archbold Biological Station has some exciting news to share: Director of Education Dustin Angell and Jill Abrahamson Memorial Education Intern, Margaret Davenport, have been hard at work on a new Archbold Education website, and they are proud to announce that Archbold's Virtual Elementary School Program for 3rd through 5th grades is now live at [archbold-education.com](http://archbold-education.com)!

The new site is geared toward classroom groups; however, many of its features may be used by parents and children outside of school. The site offers not only virtual guided nature tour events (available for all) and video chats with classrooms (by group reservation only), but also pre-recorded content and classroom activities. The

public content features educational videos and science lessons centered on the Florida scrub habitat, as well as language arts activities linked to Archbold's blog articles. Archbold's original Florida Scrub Coloring Book is available for download as well. All events and resources are being offered without charge by Archbold.

Angell explains the reason for the new website, "Usually, all the local elementary schools visit us each year. The students learn about our ecological research and experience the Florida scrub firsthand. After I learned that all the field trips from the Highlands County School District were canceled this school year due to COVID-19, I contacted them to see how we could help. I knew we could meet the challenge and create multi-media content and remote learning events."

District Science Specialist, Jennifer Reser recognizes the value of the longstanding science education partnership. She states, "The opportunities that Archbold is able to give the students of Highlands County are truly remarkable. I am very excited about the virtual trips that they are working on to continue to provide the same excellent educational experiences that we are used to. We are incredibly thankful for our partnership and the digital support that Archbold has provided in these challenging times."

The Archbold team is quick to acknowledge that outdoor education without the outdoors is not the same for the students or the educators. However, eight months of experimenting with remote learning, like running a virtual summer camp, have taught them about the benefits and downsides of remote education. For example, virtual events reach larger audiences from a wider geographic range, and are more accessible to those with mobility issues or heat sensitivities.

Recreating the experience of student choice in nature discovery is one of the aims of Davenport's intern project. She explains, "One of the major challenges with students visiting virtually, besides the physical disconnect from nature, is that they can't explore nature on their own terms. They can only see whatever we point our cameras at. Presenting the students with that feeling of discovery is the main inspiration behind my "Choose Your Own Virtual Adventure: Archbold Edition." Classes can make choices about what they want to see on the nature trail, what questions they want to ask the researchers they meet, and ultimately decide where they go on their virtual nature walk." To accomplish this, Margaret recorded nearly 30 short video clips from the nature trail. When she video chats with classrooms, their choices will determine which videos are shown.

The 2020-2021 year is not the school year students and educators expected, but thanks to a decades long relationship between the Highlands County School District and Archbold Biological Station, our local children still have the benefit and enjoyment of combining classroom learning with real-world examples of science from their region of Florida. Explore the Archbold Education website at [archbold-education.com](http://archbold-education.com).