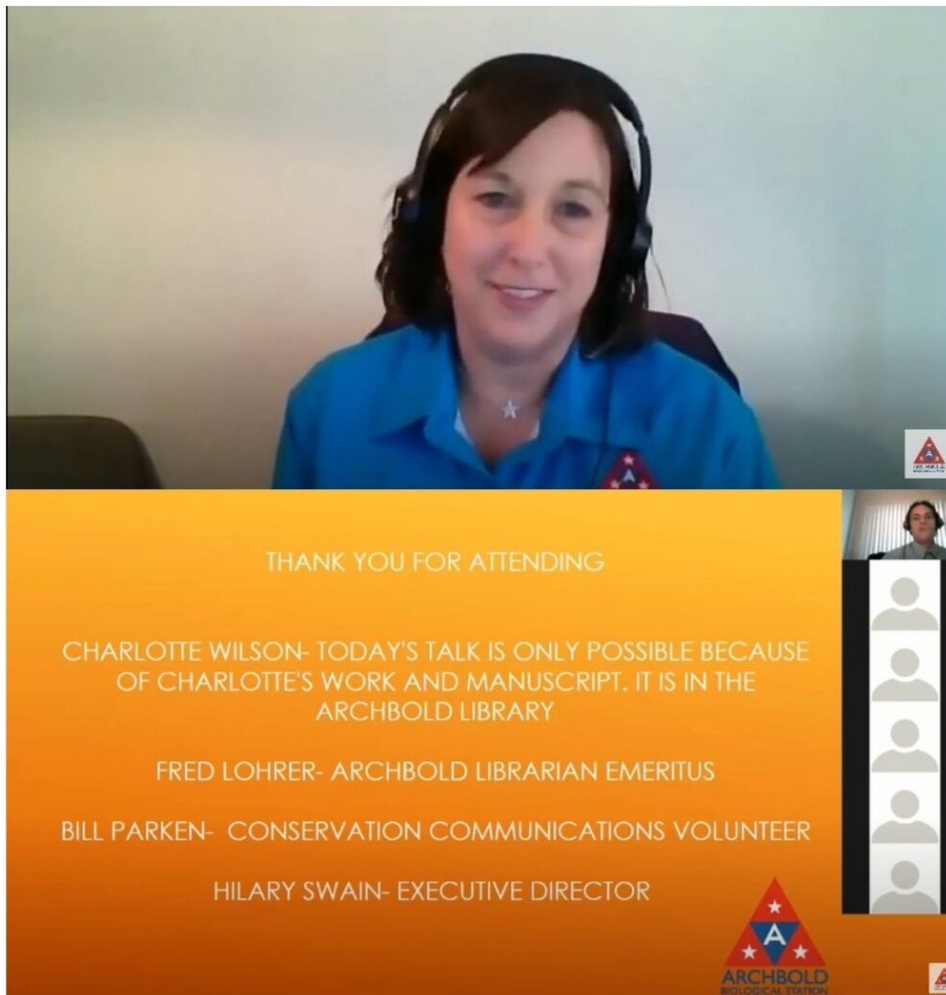


https://www.midfloridanewspapers.com/highlands_news-sun/2020-at-archbold-the-year-in-review/article_8694db7c-49d3-11eb-8701-f33184a6c728.html

2020 at Archbold: The year in review

By Archbold Biological Station
Dec 30, 2020



Executive Assistant Laura Reed looks on as Archbold Librarian Joe Gentili's computer crashes and his presentation freezes during Archbold's first-ever virtual seminar. Thanks again to viewers for your patience!

LAURA REED PHOTO

The 2020 year began like any other at Archbold...research programs continuing their long-term studies, college graduates arriving to begin their internships, university professors and elementary school teachers scheduling their yearly excursions. Executive Assistant Laura Reed remembers starting her new job around

this time, “My start date was in early February 2020, and I was instantly in awe of the talent and vast knowledge centered right here in Venus. There was so much to learn, and I was excited to become part of the team. Little did I know how quickly my job description would change!”

Executive Director Hilary Swain was in and out of the office, traveling around the country for conferences and presentations, and Reed was happy to find out that some of her down-time could be spent with the various research programs, helping with day-to-day activities, and learning about procedures. With COVID things changed rapidly and Archbold staff had to quickly adapt. The year, while very different from previous years and certainly more challenging, ended with some successes.

2020 was a year of transition and adaptation, and Archbold Biological Station’s Science Programs found a way to thrive despite the obstacles faced. Hilary Swain noted, “Like many other businesses this year, Archbold faced massive COVID-related organizational and financial challenges. College classes from across Florida and around the world cancelled their visits, as did conferences, meetings and overnight visits from conservation groups, state agencies, and research teams.

Schoolchildren visits were cancelled. They all tell us they don’t anticipate new visits until mid-2021. Our resident interns, who all decided to stay on site, were moved from their crowded dorms into small groups in Archbold’s cottage housing to increase safety. New interns and staff have to quarantine before they join research groups. Researchers are divided into small ‘siloes’ and socially distanced teams to reduce cross-program interactions. Food service ceased. Reluctantly we decided to close to the public until further notice, so we could maintain essential science and keep staff and residents safe.”

Swain continued, “Despite these disruptions, and the many limitations, I am delighted to say that our key programs have forged ahead this year. Technology saved us. I have no idea how we would have managed without Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and dedicated IT support for staff working from home. Presentations at national conferences are all held online and in December Archbold’s own online Annual Symposium was a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the year’s science achievements. Archbold continued to be strongly supported by outside grants and contracts: during 2020 there were 33 active grants for research and land management at the Station and Buck Island Ranch, with several new awards during the year.”

Joe Gentili, Archbold Librarian noted, “Archbold research has added 29 scientific publications to its database to date this year, and there will be more to come when final annual entries are completed. These publications helped the Archbold Library reach a significant milestone in 2020: after eight decades of published research, the 2500th publication. Many of these publications are available to the public through ARCHBIB, Archbold’s online database, with older publications still being added: www.archbold-station.org/html/datapub/pub/archbib/search.cfm.”

Archbold took the 2020 opportunity to conduct a deeply thoughtful strategic planning exercise which refocused the organization on increasing conservation outreach and putting more science into conservation action. The organization was successful in seeking outside support for a new Predator Prey research program, a part-time communications specialist, and a new Director of Conservation in 2021.

Regular readers of this Archbold column have learned how the Education and Communications teams adapted and grew through the pandemic — through a variety of online virtual educational opportunities that continue into 2021. Last week, the Archbold 2021 Virtual School Year website was unveiled, and several previous articles have highlighted the evolution of Archbold Education from in-person field trips to virtual scrub tours and lessons, with a total of 10 public virtual nature tours offered in addition to virtual summer Scrub Camp for students. The Communications Team transitioned Archbold’s seminar series from in-person at the Frances Archbold Hufty Learning Center to Zoom webinars in living rooms around the world.

Nine Archbold staff presented seminars to audiences as far away as Europe and Hawaii! Seven Distinguished Guest Speakers participated virtually from Saskatchewan to Florida. The Archbold intern experience usually ends with a capstone seminar in the Learning Center. This year’s 12 interns were able to present their research through virtual seminars, reaching their families and former classmates as well as Archbold and local attendees.

In all, Archbold offered 28 virtual seminars during 2020, as well as the virtual version of the Archbold Symposium. Most of these are available for viewing at www.youtube.com/user/ArchboldExpeditions. With these successes, virtual seminars, and maybe hybrid events combining in-person with virtual, will be the new normal for Archbold forever.

Early on Executive Assistant Laura Reed was appointed as a member of the new Communications Team, and soon became the behind-the-scenes host of nearly all the virtual presentations. She remarked, “At first it was daunting to imagine converting all of our learning and presentations to a virtual format. We just dove into the deep end and started swimming! After much trial and error (and thankfully a LOT of patience and encouragement from our online viewers), we not only stayed afloat but we’ve come out of 2020 with new skills and new audiences for our science news and conservation messages — not just across the United States, but also in other countries. This year added considerably to what I was originally hired to do, but I am fortunate to have gained a new skill set and knowledge from attending EVERY seminar as the host. The 2020 year has fundamentally changed the way Archbold works, forever.”

Archbold Biological Station remains closed to the public until further notice, although continues to provide research and educational opportunities as much and as safely as possible. Archbold staff and Board wish all readers, “A safe, happy, and healthy New Year!”