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Archbold, the year 2021 in review

By Special to Highlands News-Sun Provided by Archbold Biological Station
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Day breaks over the Archbold scrub: the dawn of a new day and year. Happy New Year to all from Archbold.
COURTESY/REBECCA WINDSOR

LAKE PLACID — 2021 was a year of continued adaptation at Archbold. Research programs maintained their long-term studies despite ever changing COVID-19 updates. There was a robust cohort of post-baccalaureate research interns who were eager to explore that natural laboratory that is the Florida Scrub and the unique ecosystems on Archbold's Buck Island Ranch. The Archbold intern experience usually ends with a capstone seminar in the Learning Center, —

however this year the program continued virtual seminars broadcasted live on Facebook. The Education Program unveiled the Archbold 2021 Virtual School Year website and resumed virtual scrub tours and lessons. These virtual events reached more people from across the globe, and it was exciting to grow these programs, reaching even more people in the future.

This year was also a year of exciting news and growth. Dr. Eric Menges, Archbold's director of Plant Ecology, retired after a remarkable 33 years of service. Dr. Aaron David, a former Plant Ecology Program intern, returned to Archbold to assume the position of director of Plant Ecology. Thanks to a generous donor, a director of Conservation was hired as well as a conservation cartographer, and a communications coordinator.

Archbold constantly increases outreach and turns science into conservation action. The online social media presence grew, reaching broader audiences through national media outlets. Conservation successes were celebrated with collaborators, partners, and government agencies, including the passing and signing of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act, as well as the budget allocation of \$400 million toward land conservation by the Florida House and Senate.

Archbold's Buck Island Ranch continues to lead in Agroecology with sustainable agriculture and ranching research. Gene Lollis, ranch manager, completed his year as president of the Florida Cattlemen's Association, connecting the industry with science and the public. Protecting more wild areas and working lands, like ranches, in Florida is integral to protecting wildlife and ensuring Floridians can enjoy the great outdoors for many generations to come.

Archbold would not have been able to accomplish so much this year without loyal supporters, donors, Board members, and dedicated staff. Archbold is grateful for the generosity received throughout 2021, most notably a year-end donation match made by a loyal and generous Board member, and a \$2 million gift from philanthropist K. Lisa Yang, establishing the John W. Fitzpatrick director of Avian Ecology, in honor of former executive director and current board member Dr. John Fitzpatrick.

Archbold staff also received several well-deserved awards this year, highlighting their dedication and efforts in the science community. Dr. Reed Bowman, Archbold's first John W. Fitzpatrick director of Avian Ecology, received Audubon Florida's 2021 Guy Bradley Award, and shared a United States Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Honor Award with research assistants Rebecca Windsor and Greg Thompson, and the entire Florida Grasshopper Sparrow Working Group Team, for their work with Florida Grasshopper Sparrow conservation. ■

Archbold Executive Director Dr. Hilary Swain and Archbold Data Manager Shefali Azad were both recognized at this year's annual scientific meeting by the US Department of Agriculture Long-Term Agroecosystem Research Network (LTAR) for their contributions to the network. Swain received the LTAR Founders Award in recognition of long-term leadership contributions that have influenced the vision and direction of the LTAR Network, and Azad received the LTAR Network Impact Award in recognition of individual and group network-level accomplishments that enable the LTAR Network to advance a vision for the sustainable intensification of US agriculture. Dr. Eric Menges, emeritus director of Plant Ecology, received the 2021 Mentor Award from the Florida Native Plant Society.

Although Archbold Biological Station remains closed to the general public 'drop in' visitors for now, the K-12 schools' programs, college classes, and visiting scientists have restarted as well as planned public hikes and tours. The Station and Ranch continue to produce research and provide educational opportunities. Archbold staff and board wish all readers, "A safe, happy, and healthy New Year!"
