ARCHBOLD JUNE 2015 NEWSLETTER

for curious minds

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Big-headed Ant Arrives at Archbold

Big-headed Ant *Pheidole obscurithorax*

A dead dragonfly moving across the pavement at Archbold, propelled by a superbly coordinated team of ants, recently caught the attention of Mark Deyrup. He recorded it immediately as the **first Archbold sighting of the Big-headed Ant *Pheidole obscurithorax*, a**

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Archbold Biological Station Website

South American species slowly spreading south in Florida. Native to Paraguay and Argentina, this ant was first discovered in Mobile, Alabama by E. O. Wilson in 1950. It reached Pensacola around 1992, Gainesville around 2006, and Avon Park around 2011. **The Big-headed Ant is large (for an ant), easily identified, does not bite or sting, and thrives in disturbed habitats.** And, it could give the invasive Red Imported Fire Ant a run for it's money. Mark explains, 'When fire ants find a large dead insect, a stream of workers will laboriously butcher the corpse into little bits and then carry it back. In contrast, Big-headed Ants send out a moving crew to haul back bulky insects to be carved up under guard at the nest mound entrance, displaying very efficient teamwork.' **The Big-headed Ant brings the number of ant species known from Archbold to 128!**

Tortoise Trackers

Betsie Rothermel shows visiting children Tortoise #1721 during a recent Tortoise Tracker family event sponsored by Disney Conservation Fund. Please note all tortoise research at Archbold is conducted under state/federal permits.

In mid-May, the Archbold Herpetology Program **provided a special opportunity for 12 families to become 'tortoise trackers for a day'**. Dr. Betsie Rothermel shared highlights of Archbold's 48 years of Gopher Tortoise research before the group hit the trail to radiotrack a tortoise. Tortoise #1721 was still tucked

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"Archbold Biological Station is one of America's iconic centers of continuous research

inside her burrow on May 16 but was out grazing on May 17. Participants peeked inside the tortoise burrow with a video scope before returning to the Learning Center for Gopher Games, such as creating a wearable tortoise shell, ageing tortoises by counting annuli (rings) on the shell, and identifying plants that tortoises eat. One Lake Placid resident, Kennedy, commented **'I loved learning how tortoises guard their eggs from predators and about their head bobbing. It was so cool!**' Bonnie Schoenfeld said Kennedy, her curious 7-year-old granddaughter, loves animals and wants to be a scientist. She was the first one to spot Tortoise #1721 and cannot wait for her first Archbold Scrub Camp this summer!'

and education in field biology. It is a prototype of what we need all across America."

— Edward O. Wilson

Archbold's Landscaping is Exemplary

Click here for a beautiful slideshow featuring Archbold landscaping.

Archbold is honored to be the recipient of the 2015 Award of Excellence in the Landscape Awards Program from the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) for native landscaping at the Learning Center and Lodge. Eric Menges and Mark Deyrup, accompanied by Nancy Bissett from The Natives, accepted the award on May 30th at the FNPS annual meeting in Tallahassee. Archbold is indebted to Nancy Bissett and The Natives whose talented green thumbs made all this possible, and to Stantec for original site design and permitting. **FNPS described Archbold's landscaping as 'beautiful and harmonious as well as functional and above all inspirational**. This exemplary project combines an aesthetic landscape with needed and functional habitat. It adds to the ecology of the region and we hope to see this type of unique and beneficial ecological landscape on other buildings and campuses. It is truly a wonderful, educational and beneficial project.' Archbold is proud to work with the FNPS to promote the benefits of native plants.

Preserving Nature One Jar at a Time

Eight Month Archbold Research Internships Available in Plant Ecology! Late August 2015 – April 2016. Ideal for Students with Undergraduate Degrees Contemplating Graduate School. View full description here.

Archbold Facebook Event Calendar

Butch Norden in the Archbold wet collection

Butch Norden is a curious naturalist who did graduate work on planarians, or flatworms, and enjoyed a successful career as a biologist working for Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Now retired and residing locally, **Norden is one of our 'virtuoso volunteers', helping us inventory, reorganize, and maintain the Archbold collection of preserved specimens of amphibians, reptiles, and fish**. The wet collection is a treasure trove of biodiversity data for research and serves as a reference for identifying live specimens and updating distribution maps. Norden commented, 'The Archbold collection is absolutely fascinating because of the location on the south end of the Lake Wales Ridge. There are **lots of ecologically interesting and endemic specialties**. I've learned a lot about the local amphibians and reptiles and new taxonomy. For example, toads are no longer *Bufo*!' Many specimens were roadkill, and Norden emphasized that you really need a good reason for collecting. **Thanks to Butch, we plan to make the herpetology specimen data available online!**

Funds for a Blue Feather Quest

Check out the Archbold Education Scrub Blog

Directions to Archbold Biological Station

Eight miles south of Lake Placid. Entrance is 1.8 miles south of SR 70 on Old SR 8.

A very blue, to us, Florida Scrub-Jay

Florida Scrub-Jay males look identical to females from a human perspective. But, scrub-jays can see colors in the UV (ultraviolet) spectrum and **male plumage is shifted farther towards UV colors making them look different from females**...but only to other birds! According to University of South Florida Biology graduate student and Archbold Avian Ecology intern, Becky Windsor, these UV feathers have something to tell us. **Windsor's Master's project is exploring how the environment affects scrub-jay feather color, and if color influences who becomes a breeder or not.** Windsor said, 'Working with Dr. Reed Bowman in the Avian Ecology Program has really helped me hone my ornithology interests and develop an exciting project to increase our understanding of Florida Scrub-Jays.' Windsor recently won the Cruickshank Research Award from the Florida Ornithological Society. She will **use the funds to purchase a new spectrometer** to measure and quantify the ultraviolet reflectance of Florida Scrub-Jay feathers.

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