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50 years in the Scrub: Dr. James N. Layne at Archbold Biological Station

June 8, 2017 marks a special anniversary for Archbold Biological Station and Highlands County. On this date 50 years ago, Dr. James N. Layne was hired to be Archbold's first Director of Research. He worked closely with Richard Archbold, during the last decade of Archbold's life. Richard Archbold was a pioneer establishing his biological research station and also engaged in conservation efforts here in Highlands County and the rest of Florida. Richard Archbold's dedication and resources were applied to understand and conserve the natural treasures of our region. Following Archbold's death Dr. Layne was appointed Executive Director and tasked with guiding and directing the Station's future.

Dr. Layne's training and expertise mostly centered on mammals. Before coming to Archbold, he had served on the faculty at the University of Florida and at Cornell University, his Alma Mater. He stated that he was attracted to Archbold by, "the lure of excellent facilities, unlimited time for research, and living in a part of the country that appeals to me very much."

He added, "This and the fact that the Archbold position offered an entirely new opportunity and lots of challenge finally convinced me to make the change."

While at Archbold Dr. Layne said he mainly engaged in "long-term monitoring of small mammal populations in different habitats." Squirrels, mice, shrews, opossums, raccoons, bobcats, and armadillos; were just a few of the animals he worked with. His mammal research to date has generated 65 scientific papers and substantially increased the overall knowledge about Florida mammals. In 1976 Dr. Layne was the first recipient of the prestigious C. Hart Merriam Award of the American Society of Mammalogists. This Award recognizes "a record of excellence in: scientific research, education, and service to mammal related organizations."

Dr. Layne did not limit his career to only mammals. He also studied Caracaras, Kestrels, Sandhill Cranes, Gopher Tortoises and Indigo Snakes. Gopher Tortoise research began in 1967, and he described his study at that time as, "a large series of tortoises has been marked and recaptures are providing information on the extent of movements in the population." This study, now the longest running Gopher Tortoise study anywhere, continues to this day managed by the next generation of Archbold researchers. Nearly 50 tortoises originally marked by Dr. Layne are still being recorded decades later.

In 1968 Dr. Layne was instrumental in bringing Dr. Glen Woolfenden, from the University of South Florida to Archbold to begin his work on the Florida Scrub-Jay. Dr. Layne said the scrub jay work was particularly important because it "provides the basis for intelligent action to preserve threatened species or habitats." Archbold scientists still spend thousands of hours each year in the scrub studying tortoises and scrub jays, both species synonymous with our region. This legacy of study and conservation had its beginning in the vision of long-term research that Dr. Layne brought to Archbold.

Realizing that environmental education is an important part of science and conservation, Dr. Layne initiated a variety of education programs that are still carried out today. He initiated Archbold's research intern program that brings college students from across the country for training at Archbold. There are now more than 500 research intern Archbold alumni from this program in careers worldwide. He also encouraged graduate students to conduct their research at Archbold: 190 MSc and PhD theses have been completed during the last 50 years. Lastly, he encouraged local school classes to visit Archbold on their end-of-year field trips. He

developed a tour routine that later became incorporated into environmental education programs for 4th grade Highlands County students that is still in place today.

Dr. Layne understood that the areas where plants and animals live need to be undeveloped and wild to ensure they can thrive without the interference from human development. On his first day Archbold's property totaled 1,052 acres of land. Understanding the need to conserve, Dr. Layne used his influence and authority to "increase our land holdings from about 1,000 to 4,400 acres." This included the addition of Lake Annie to the Station in 1983 "after hard and effective persuasion." These lands have remained undeveloped and will be kept as pristine wilderness so that generations of Floridians will have an opportunity to see what natural Florida is like.

Dr. Layne still lives in the Lake Placid area and he has since 1967. He was married for 65 years to his wife Lois who passed away on March 18, 2016. They have five daughters; Linda, Kim, Jamie, Susan, and Rachel. Four of his daughters still live in the area and three have worked for the Highlands County school system.

Archbold has a proud 75-year history of understanding and conserving the natural areas of our region. It is important for all future generations to understand and experience this Florida that is all too rapidly disappearing elsewhere in the State. Dr. Layne was tasked with overseeing the continuation of this legacy after Richard Archbold's death. He retired in 1994 but remained active throughout his life. Recently with help from his family a complete archive of all of Dr. Layne's research materials, correspondence, and more has been established at Archbold. Today the 4th Archbold Executive Director, Hilary Swain and dozens of scientists and other employees work throughout the region, extending Dr. Layne's enduring legacy. In an unbroken chain from Archbold to Dr. Layne to the present and the future Archbold continues to understand and conserve our precious natural heritage.

Photo 1: Dr. Layne holding a Crested Caracara in 1974. Photo by Linda Layne.



Photo 2: Richard Archbold and Dr. Layne holding a Gopher Tortoise in 1967. Photo by Archbold Biological Station.

