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### **Living and working at Buck Island Ranch**

Archbold's Buck Island Ranch, a 10,500-acre working ranch, is home to the MacArthur Agro-ecology Research Center and provides researchers the opportunity to find solutions for sustaining economic and ecological values of working landscapes. For research assistants, interns, and volunteers at Buck Island Ranch, typical data collection ranges from collecting feral hog 'dung' in the middle of day, sampling plants in wetlands wearing waders at 90°F or surveying wildlife during heavy rain, to name just a few.

"One way of thanking our staff and students is making sure that their experiences here will serve them well in their future career," says Dr. Betsey Boughton, Director of Research at Buck Island Ranch. Interns have the opportunity to develop their own research project and improve their scientific skills with the help of Archbold researchers. Working for Archbold is also a social experience. "At Buck Island Ranch, we usually have between one to four interns at any one time as well as the occasional volunteer," explains Dr. Boughton. "This little group lives together at the Ranch sharing lodging, helping each other with their respective projects, and gathering with their fellow interns who stay at Archbold Biological Station every Wednesday evening for 'family dinner'."

Keith Brinsko, Research Assistant at Buck Island Ranch, is born and bred in Florida and graduated from University of Central Florida with a degree in Biology. Brinsko's work is part of the federally funded Long-Term Agro-Ecosystem Research network involving multiple locations in the country.

“Going from life as a college student in Orlando to conducting research at a cattle ranch in Lake Placid is one of the most extreme transitions I have ever gone through. I love being around the tranquility of nature, and working at the Ranch has made me never want to leave.”

Archbold not only attracts Florida residents, but also students from all over the United States (California, Maine, Wisconsin, Ohio, and so on) and from outside the United States (France, India, Trinidad and Tobago, Italy). For them, this is a great opportunity to discover the beauty of rural Central Florida, which is often so different from their homeland.

Elizabeth Bouchard, an intern who has recently returned to Maine, where she hopes to pursue a career in biology says, “My Archbold internship at Buck Island Ranch was an amazing experience. By assisting with a variety of research projects and conducting my own independent research, I learned many valuable skills for graduate school and beyond. The Archbold staff was incredibly supportive throughout the process of carrying out my project. They are both friendly and knowledgeable—always willing to answer a question or lend a hand.”

For Alex Makowiki nothing is more pleasant than to walk out of the intern’s lodging, hop on an all-terrain vehicle and work all day in the middle of a pasture. Makowiki is from New York State, a recent graduate from Walsh University in Ohio, and is adapting well to ranch life, “Working at Buck Island Ranch is more than just a job, it is a life lesson, you have to adapt to what nature throws at you,” he says. Makowiki joined Archbold to help collect nitrous oxide gas samples which are emitted from pasture soils, as part of a collaborative work between Archbold, Cornell University, and University of Illinois. For his intern project, he decided to study tree and shrub encroachment and how prescribed fires affect tree densities in pastures at Buck Island Ranch. “I have a passion for trees. For now I don’t know what the results of this project will be, as I still have to finish data collection,” he explains.

Avarna Jain is from New Delhi (India) and recently finished her undergraduate studies at Vanderbilt University (Nashville, Tennessee). Jain’s intern project is related to methane emissions, another important greenhouse gas, from pasture soils. Jain enjoys learning new practical skills, “working with sensors, troubleshooting electronics problems, are things I have never done before and are totally different from the type of research I conducted before,” she says. According to her working at Archbold is easy because it has a small community vibe, where you can talk with anybody about anything.

Miquel Descartin, a senior at Sebring High School, volunteered at Buck Island Ranch over the summer. Descartin has an interest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) particularly chemistry and his internship with Archbold allowed him to work on water, plant, and soil chemistry. “My time at Archbold’s Buck Island Ranch was quite fruitful. It has given me much experience in the field and in the lab, especially in the fields of chemistry and biology, which will be helpful for me when I plan to pursue a major in chemistry. My experiences here have given me insight into what I plan to specialize in the future, as well as learning new skills which I hope will be helpful in my future career.”

The research conducted at Archbold would not be possible without the help and dedication of many research assistants, interns, and volunteers. Archbold has trained about 550 research

interns in the last 25 years, and 70 of them have been located at Buck Island Ranch. Dr. Greg Sonnier, staff at Archbold who trains interns at the Ranch noted, “We will continue this work of educating young minds and helping them to achieve their goals. If you know an aspiring young scientist in high school or recent college graduate who is interested in pursuing a career in science please make sure to mention Archbold Biological Station.”

**Photo 1: Avarna Jain, Research Intern at Buck Island Ranch, setting up field equipment for her project. Photo by Archbold Biological Station.**



**Photo 2: Elizabeth Brouchard, former Research Intern at Buck Island Ranch. Photo by Dustin Angell.**

