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Vaughn-Jordan Foundation funds internship at Archbold

Archbold Biological Station draws world-class scientists and academics from all over the world to its natural beauty and outdoor laboratory. Visiting researchers also include a number of young scientists just beginning their careers who come to Highlands County to work at this prestigious institution. Since the 1980's, Archbold has run an internship program to provide research training to recent college graduates. "Interns benefit from living and working in a field station setting, participating in a lively intellectual atmosphere with many senior scientists, and designing and completing their own independent research project," explains Executive Director Dr. Hilary Swain. "It is one of only a few programs nationwide that allows recent graduates to gain research experience before they commit to a graduate program or choose another career path." In fact, Archbold has supported more than 500 interns and the plant ecology program more than 120 since the program began.

One such intern is Marisa Grillo of Archbold's Plant Ecology Program. Marisa came to Archbold last February from New Jersey. Although it was hard to make the choice to move far from home and loved ones, Marisa was up for the adventure. "I was attracted to the internship program at Archbold for the chance to join a well-known lab with decades of interesting research and for the opportunity to design my own research project," she says. Plant Ecology Program Director Dr. Eric Menges notes that Marisa has "enthusiastically thrown herself into a variety of botanical, ecological, and conservation projects being undertaken by the Plant Ecology Program."

"Marisa started an independent project that takes advantage of the huge number of seedlings of the beautiful Sky Blue Lupine (*Lupinus diffusus*), growing following a prescribed burn. She got the idea for her project while participating in a public walk last February," Dr. Menges explains. "I am trying to understand why the lupine population skyrocketed in that recently burned area," Marisa adds. "To do this, I am collecting data on lupine survival and reproduction, what the habitat looks like in areas with

and without lupine, and the viability of the seeds these plants are producing.” Most of Archbold’s interns are funded primarily by its endowment, but the Vaughn-Jordan Foundation, which has a mission of furthering botanical and horticultural science, funds Marisa’s internship. Grants from the Foundation have primarily included scholarships for graduate and undergraduate students in the field of botany or horticultural science. The Plant Ecology Program at Archbold has been receiving awards from the Foundation in each of the last five years. “The Vaughn-Jordan award allows us to hire an additional intern and augment their experience with an opportunity to present their work at a regional scientific conference,” comments Dr. Menges. “We are incredibly grateful for gifts like these. They allow us to train even more interested and enthusiastic young scientists. These awards can make an incredible impact on a student’s career.”

Moreover, for Marisa, the impact of working at Archbold has been profound. “The scrub was a foreign land to me before I arrived, and it is really changing the way I think about ecology,” she says. “Working with other passionate plant scientists has been really inspiring, and critical in my development as a research scientist. I love that Archbold scientists care about rare and endemic plants, and that the research we do can inform important conservation decisions that may save their populations. Plants are all too often overlooked by people, even though they are both so beautiful and important to the ecosystem as a whole.”

Photo 1: Marisa Grillo, one of Archbold’s current Plant Ecology Program interns, collects data for the long-term study of Lewton’s Polygala (*Polygala lewtonii*), one of the many projects interns have the opportunity to participate in. Photo by Stephanie Koontz.



Photo 2: Plant Ecology intern Marisa Grillo studies the effects of fire and habitat on Sky Blue Lupine, pictured here. Photo credit: Archbold Biological Station.

