



AZFO Student Scholarship Recipient Essay 2017

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This year I was lucky enough to be one of three recipients of the Arizona Field Ornithologist (AZFO) youth scholarship and attend their annual meeting. I was notified that I had received the AZFO Youth Scholarship and I could not have been more thrilled. My friend and co-worker, Chrissy Kondrat-Smith, advised me to apply and when I received an e-mail from Lauren Harter saying that I have been given the opportunity to attend the meeting I was so excited. I also really love the town of Cottonwood but I had never had the opportunity to go birding through the riparian areas of the town, so I felt lucky that the meeting was held in a beautiful area.

On Friday afternoon I arrived in Cottonwood and I met up with the group and the leader, Ryan P. O'Donnell. We drove to Dead Horse Ranch State Park. It was a pleasant state park to go birding. It had a nice pond and an assortment of vegetation, as well as high perches for raptors. Our observations ranged from a Pied-billed Grebe and a Great Blue Heron to raptors such as the Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, and three Red-tailed Hawks. I also had quite a few lifers on this expedition. These included a Sora, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallows, Bridled Titmouse, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and a Verdin. I learned the most about sparrows on this expedition and my leader and people from my group were very helpful in differentiating between seven different sparrows: Chipping Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow (Gambel's and non-Gambel's), Song Sparrow, and Lincoln's Sparrow. I was very impressed because identifying between sparrows has always been a weak spot for me and I valued their knowledge.

Friday evening we had a social hour at a delicious pizza place called Pizzeria Bocce. It was a great opportunity to meet other members of AZFO while enjoying some tasty food and drinks. The following morning I was greeted by many friendly faces, some new and some familiar. After I received my name tag, I grabbed a drink and snacks then sat down to enjoy the presentations. This year there were some really great presentations about ongoing research on the status, behavior, and distribution of Arizona birds. Some of my favorite presentations were "North America's only Caracara: Wide-ranging but little known" by Morrison and also "Distribution and habitat of elf owls in riparian environments in Arizona" by David Vander Pluym. A social hour at THAT brewery followed the presentations. I enjoyed talking to others about how their birding expeditions went the day before and also meeting new faces.