



## **AZFO Student Scholarship Recipient Essay 2019**

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**Undergraduate student at University of Arizona**

This September, I had the honor of attending the AZFO meeting in Flagstaff, AZ solely because of the youth scholarship. Prior to the meeting, I had heard of the organization and was aware of the annual event through my internship at Tucson Audubon. As a busy and budget-bound undergraduate student, I never thought I would have the chance to attend. However, when Olya Phillips at Tucson Audubon told me about the AZFO youth scholarship, I knew it was the perfect opportunity to get my way in!

I drove up to Flagstaff on Friday morning and made it just in time to tag along on a birding expedition in Kachina Wetlands. Christina Vojta and Tom Hedwall led our group. I felt very welcomed by them and all the participants. We saw over 40 species in about 2 hours (many I hadn't seen before), which was pretty good for a late afternoon in September!

The day of the meeting, I was kept on the edge of my seat the whole day, intently listening to all the presenters. Although all of the talks were awesome and informative, I particularly enjoyed Nick Beauregard's, which featured his research regarding yellow-billed cuckoos. I also was intrigued when Michele Losee spoke about new methods for selecting wind turbine sites to reduce avian mortality of migrating species. It was really fun to see a 5-minute presentation by Jennie MacFarland about the Lucy's Warbler, a project that I have participated in for the last two years.

The evening wrapped up with a delicious dinner and an inspiring keynote speech. Chuck LaRue told us about Ancient field ornithology among the Navajo and Hopi Nations. He described traditions from thousands of years ago that still are in practice today, like the use of prayer feathers. Objects such as feather blankets that were hundreds of years old were displayed. Many birders were quick to identify the birds woven into the blankets based on the beautifully preserved plumage that was still visible. I thought that this was a nice way to cap the day. It balanced the science and spirituality and was a reminder of how people from all backgrounds can appreciate birds.

On Sunday, I wrapped up my weekend with attending a Raptor ID workshop at the AZ Game and Fish office. I chose to attend this workshop over another field trip because I had noticed that I had trouble identifying different raptors in the field. Even in just the month following the workshop, I have noticed that my eye has improved greatly.

My experience at the AZFO annual meeting has benefitted me greatly in my personal and professional life. I loved meeting like-minded people and gaining knowledge from birders and scientists who have had years of experience. It was fun to talk to people in my age



group that have a passion for birds like me, as I don't always have that opportunity in my everyday life. Professionally, the event has given me network opportunities that will help in the upcoming months and years following my graduation this spring. I believe being an AZFO member will be noteworthy on my grad school/ job applications. Also, just learning about all the ongoing research within our state helps me think about some possible future research!

I would like to thank the Maricopa and Prescott Audubon Societies for providing these scholarships. Without my scholarship, I would not have had the chance to participate with this organization and be exposed to everything I learned. I will remember this meeting as playing a crucial role in my development and refinement in my passion for birds. I am very much looking forward to next years' meeting and being an AZFO member for life!