



AZFO Student Scholarship Recipient Essay 2017

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My fondness for birds blossomed at the young age of four when my late grandmother would tell me tales of her adventures across the world, describing all the various birds she had seen in her travels. Not long after, my fascination grew and off we went. We traveled often to California and all over Arizona. When I was five I took up volunteering at Hassayampa River Preserve. There I bird banded and this is where I had the pleasure to meet Lauren Harter. I soon became a regular bird bander volunteer and often saw Lauren when she came down with her college group.

Fast forward with several years of bird banding, banding trips, numerous bird chases, hikes and more. Soon my mother introduced me to AZFO. My first meeting was in Phoenix, then attended the one in Yuma. We had known about the Youth Scholarship for a while. This year, I finally gathered up all the information needed and applied. One other recipient, Melissa Folsom and I were lucky enough to be chosen. I couldn't wait for the meeting!

The first day of the three day weekend, we left our house before the peak of dawn and traveled to Shield Ranch. There my mom and Eric Hough led a walk. Not even including the wonderful and interesting wildlife we encountered, the aromatic atmosphere and witnessing what we found at this abnormal destination was delightful all by itself. It was interesting to note that we birded between two very important habitats to birds in that area. On one side stood the thick growth of mesquite, cottonwoods and willows along the Verde River. The other side held a flat landscape above with a freshly dug up farming ground below. Patches of dirt were lightly dusted with sprouts and the dirt was moist from a recent watering. Either way, the meadowlarks loved scavenging around on the ground about one other, then taking cover in the shrubs as we approached. A friendly Black Phoebe had also followed us down the farm road and around the bend. Though it wasn't just the birds which were exciting and finding out what lingered on this low-birded spot, I learned a few cool facts about damselflies from Laurie as I watched them dance above us. After the field trips we went to the meeting room, where I helped set up all the chairs and gave a hand at the tables with books.

The second day arrived - meeting day! So many attention absorbing talks were presented, I couldn't look away. Probably two of the most riveting talks, in my opinion, were Joan Morrison's knowledge on Crested Caracara's and the talk by Bonnie Swarbrick on the Range Expansion of Mexican Ducks and Northern Mallards in Arizona. Bonnie Swarbrick conveyed how the Mexican Duck's range had expanded from its historical scope it had lived by for so long. She explained and gave proof in her survey results to provide evidence that this may be caused by human alteration. Ms. Swarbrick also discussed the effects



caused by Northern Mallards. She also explained the variations seen in the two ducks. Overall it was an interesting presentation as were the many others I saw that day. It was also cool to find out Ms. Swarbrick was new to AZFO.

We wrapped up the meeting with a hilarious yet engaging Audio quiz by my friend Caleb and Photo Identification Quiz by another friend, David. Afterwards, I had several interesting conversations with many experienced birders, old-time friends and mentors. Everyone I talked to were delighted to share their sightings and stories with me. Following the departure of the meeting, I helped clean up and put the tables away, heading to bed to get an early start on the final day.

Our original plans had been canceled, but we had the opportunity on the final day to join in the eBird workshop. There I was able to expand my understanding of eBird, update my account and overall better my listing capabilities. Not only that, but I was intrigued to learn where my data would be going and how it could be used. We were shown these beautiful maps of millions of little glowing dots. They fluctuated to a lighter white glow the more the certain bird species was spotted in a certain area, the glow outlined the birds' distribution in increments of a time. With information from eBird, the Cornell Lab could put it all together and create these to follow certain species from Canada to South America. We were taught the ins and outs of the website quite thoroughly and how to use it. Something I plan to do once I obtain a phone of course!

This whole experience has been thoroughly fun and invigorating and I can't wait to return next year for the following meeting! I hope the next generation of kids and teens can find love in this green world like I have. Maybe I can even get my brother interested as he grows old enough to attend and learn like I do.

Thank you AZFO and Prescott Audubon Society for this experience and I promise to pass down all my knowledge to those after me as those at the meeting had to me. This is truly a week to remember and share.