



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

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The AZFO conference this year was my first professional scientific conference, made possible through the Youth Scholarship. As I am an undergraduate student from the University of Arizona, cost was a big factor in deciding to go, and I am more than happy that I attended. My career as an ornithologist started in May 2018 by volunteering with Tucson Audubon Society, and has continued to evolve, as birds are the most fascinating organisms out there to me. Visiting Flagstaff was a nice short vacation from Tucson and school. Taking a field trip to Lockett Meadow was a wonderful break from the academic aspect of ornithology that I have been working in for about a year, as I got to practice my bird ID and simply relax, enjoy the walk, and just listen to and see the birds.

The conference day itself was fun, engaging, and eye-opening, as the presentations made me realize all the various paths I could take as an ornithologist. It was great to see graduate students present their research, and to meet other professionals attending the event. After having volunteered on Yellow-Billed Cuckoo surveys and working part time on organizing the survey data for US Fish & Wildlife Service, seeing and meeting Nick Beauregard was great. I was happy to see him present the fruition of his research and volunteer hours, and what that data means for the conservation and future of the distinct population. Meeting with Jennie MacFarland from Tucson Audubon was also fun, as I got to see her present Tucson Audubon's work in a new, professional environment. Chuck LaRue's talk on "Birding the Navajo and Hopi Nations: Recent and Ancient Field Ornithology in the Four Corners" was fascinating, and it opened many new thoughts I have on our deep connection to birds historically and evolutionarily. This talk reminded me how important it is to have an appreciation for birds aside from academia as the Native Americans did before.

I left early next morning, regretfully not attending any of the Sunday workshops or field trips due to exams I had for school the following week. Despite this, I would like to thank Maricopa Audubon Society, Prescott Audubon Society, and the anonymous donor for funding the Youth Scholarship. I would also like to thank Olya Phillips for encouraging me to apply, along with other Tucson Audubon staff members for their support and kindness. I will be trying to graduate from the University of Arizona next fall, but I look forward to attending the next AZFO conference in Safford!