



AZFO Student Scholarship Recipient Essay 2014

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This year I was lucky enough to be one of three recipients of the Arizona Field Ornithologists (AZFO) youth scholarships to go to their annual meeting. I was very excited to receive this scholarship and finally go to the AZFO meeting which I had wanted to go to for quite some time. Arizona in particular has a very special place in my heart as it was one of my first introductions into the amazing and mysterious world of birds. I grew up in the town of Tijeras which in the mountains just east of Albuquerque, New Mexico. This is where my love of nature and especially birds was born. I have been a very serious birder now for the past four years and the reason why Arizona has a special place in my heart as it was there that I took my first birding trip. On that trip I realized my true love of birds and traveling and since then I have been completely unable to stop! I have taken several birding trips to Arizona now and it continues to be one of my favorite places in the world to go to! This is why I applied for the scholarship the second I heard about it. I will never pass up an opportunity to take a trip to Arizona!

I was ecstatic the second I headed for the small town of Globe, Arizona! There are few things I love more than hitting the open road and heading out for what I know will be an amazing birding trip. I was so excited I gave myself several extra hours so that I could get as much birding time in as I could. On the trip out there I was treated to many raptors along the way such as Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, and even a very beautiful Ferruginous Hawk! One of my favorite parts of being able to travel is seeing the many different habitats that the Southwest has to offer. I went through open grasslands that seemed to go on forever, I drove along steep mountain cliffs that I could imagine Golden Eagles and Peregrine Falcons used during the summer, and beautiful cottonwood Bosques that ran along dry creeks and riverbeds. Just getting to Globe made the trip worth it! That first night I had trouble sleeping as I was very excited. I have been to several of the New Mexico Ornithological Society meetings which I always love and learn many new things and I knew this meeting would be full of new information just like the NMOS meetings are.

The next morning I raced over to the meeting and was greeted by many friendly, new faces and a couple familiar ones. After greeting everyone, I grabbed some coffee and a muffin and sat down to see what new information my brain could absorb! I honestly can't tell you which my favorite presentation was. I loved all of them. Some that particularly caught my interest had to do with Gray Hawks and Purple Martins. Both are species I have seen and both species I saw for the first time in Arizona despite the fact that both species breed in my own state. It was amazing learning not only about those birds, but about the history of the areas that these birds live in. I was amazed to learn that historically there were no cottonwoods along the San Pedro River and how ranching ultimately led to the change



along the river which has allowed the Gray Hawks to move in and now successfully breed. And as far as Purple Martins go, they have always been one of my favorite birds. I will never forget seeing my first pair in southeast Arizona. They were so huge and it was amazing seeing them slowly soar around my head and I was even lucky enough to see them going to and from a cavity in a saguaro! So naturally the talk about the nesting behavior of these beautiful and amazing birds was definitely one of my highlights of the trip! Despite the many amazing and informative talks, I think my favorite didn't really talk about statistics or any current problems but was fun and informative anyways! That talk was the videos of the nesting pair of Lesser Nighthawks. I was amazed but the videos which were cute and funny as well as at times a bit scary! I loved watching the chicks throw their wings into the air as ran (and I'm guessing screaming as well) up to their parents begging for food. I was also very interesting seeing how when their parents weren't around, the chicks were almost always completely still. This became very obvious how well this defense works when one of the clips showed a Greater Roadrunner zoom by and the chicks instantly curled up and stayed completely still. If I didn't already know they were there I never would have guessed they weren't just rocks.

Ultimately my trip to the AZFO annual meeting was one I will never forget! I came away with fun times, new and fun information, and best of all new friends and new bird experiences. I am so thankful that I was lucky enough to have been chosen for this youth scholarship and I know there will be many more young people after me who will enjoy it just as much as I have!