



AZFO Student Scholarship Recipient Essay 2015

Karina Cocks

High school student from Oak Hills, California

I was ecstatic when I found out that I had received the Arizona Field Ornithologists Youth Scholarship. I had heard about the scholarship from my friend and mentor Lauren Harter, and I was so happy to get an email from her saying that I had been given the opportunity to attend the meeting. I was also very excited that the meeting would be in Show Low, Arizona, because I had always wanted to go there. I began packing early in the week and headed out on Thursday, September 17th.

When I arrived on Friday afternoon and met up with my group and the leader Chris Benesh, we jumped right into our birding activities. We headed out to the South Fork of the Little Colorado River and the Grasslands Wildlife Area. During this expedition I was able to meet many new people and I learned so much within a matter of hours. I was also able to get quite a few lifers on this expedition. These included a Green-tailed Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Hammond's Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, Vesper Sparrow, Mountain Bluebird, Canyon Towhee, Brewer's Sparrow, and Long-eared Owl. I learned the most about sparrows on this expedition and my leader and people from my group were very helpful in showing me how to identify different species of sparrows.

The next day was the day of the meeting. The meeting began with a presentation about raptor migration by Zach Smith which I found to be very interesting. The second presentation however, was one of the most interesting to me. It was about Gray Hawk expansion on the San Pedro River. I thought this was interesting because the research, by Ariana LaPorte, is very similar to the type of research that I would someday like to conduct. I also enjoyed the presentation about the Elegant Trogons because it inspired me to really want to see these birds. The audio and photo quiz were also interesting to take. I did pretty well on the photo quiz, but not so much on the audio quiz. These quizzes taught me a lot about identification by sound and by sight. Lastly, I thought the presentation by Chris Benesh during the dinner was very interesting. It was fascinating to see how birding has evolved during the past 20 years from audio identification to our overall understanding of birds and their behaviors. Overall, the meeting was full of information and facts that I was able to obtain and will hopefully use in the future during birding or discussing birds with others.

On Sunday I was able to attend another one of the expeditions that went to Sheep's Crossing and the West Fork at Mt. Baldy Trail. This expedition consisted of a lot of hiking and beautiful scenery. I was able to get a few more lifers on this expedition as well. These included many, many Golden-crowned Kinglets, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, an American Three-toed Woodpecker, and a Townsend's Warbler. This expedition really opened my

eyes to Arizona's beauty and its amazing range of bird species as well. This expedition and the experience as a whole was an amazing learning experience and I am so glad and thankful that I was given the opportunity to attend.

