

Western Field Ornithologists 2020 High School Student Essay Contest



The Western Field Ornithologists is holding an essay contest in 2020 for students in grades 9 through 12. Applicants must be a current WFO member or they may join at the \$10 annual student rate when the essay is submitted (membership details below).

The mission of the Western Field Ornithologists is to promote the study, appreciation, and protection of birds in western North America.

The theme of the essay contest is the impact of climate change on bird populations. Climate change is impacting western bird populations now and these impacts will likely be more severe and widespread in the near future. Your essay should focus on climate change, its causes and consequences, and the effect of these environmental changes on bird populations today and likely in the future. Your essay may consider climate change broadly or it may explore a narrow or specific aspect of climate change. An essay could concentrate on a region of the western United States (Mohave desert, coastal wetlands, seabirds, Central Valley of California, mountains, monsoon area of the southwest), a group of birds (neotropical migrants, waterfowl, shorebirds) or a specific type of environmental impact related to a changing climate such as rising sea levels, warming air temperatures, drought, wildfire, or disease.

The objective of the essay contest is to give high school-aged students and birders an opportunity to become familiar with some of the scientific literature on climate change and birds, and to summarize their readings into a well-written and persuasive essay. In the process of preparing their essay and doing the necessary research, students will develop their writing and critical thinking skills.

Winning Entry Prize: The student who submits the winning essay will win a pair of either Zeiss 8X42 “Terra ED” binoculars or Nikon 8X42 “Monarch 7” binoculars.

Essay Rules and Guidelines

- Four pages minimum for text, not including the Reference section and any included photos, figures, or tables
- 8 pages maximum, text and supplemental material
- Double-spaced; use Times 12 pt. font; 1-inch margins
- Cite at least five scientific reference papers. Please list references using the style in Western Birds. See, (https://www.westernfieldornithologists.org/docs/journal_guidelines.pdf)
- Submit the essay as a PDF

Guidelines and Elements for a Successful Essay

This essay contest is an individual project, not a group effort. Consultation with others about ideas or topics is allowed and encouraged, however writing and editing must be done entirely by the student. The essay must be original and all work is to be done solely by the student. Plagiarism is not acceptable and verbatim statements by others must be enclosed in quotation marks.

In general, an essay is written to convince someone of something or to simply inform the reader about a particular topic. Give the reason or reasons for writing your essay; why should we care about your topic? Pay attention to the main idea of your essay; your motive for choosing your topic; the structure of your essay; and how you shape your points, evidence, and arguments.

- Choose a title that captures the essence of the main ideas in your essay
- Use topic sentences as much as possible
- Keep quotes by others limited and used only to make a point or support a thought
- Strive for clear writing and avoid redundancy
- Pay attention to sentence structure, grammar and spelling
- Provide a conclusion that restates your main ideas or arguments, and that might point the way towards future thinking or a possible resolution related to your topic
- Cite scientific references to support key points and facts; list these in the Reference section
- Consider contacting an ornithologist engaged in climate change research to request a phone, email, or in-person interview to learn more about this topic.

Judging Rubric

Judges will consider these five elements when evaluating the essays (weight given to each element in parentheses):

- Essay content: is it scientifically and ecologically sound? (40%)
- Does the essay focus on the theme? (25%)
- Is the essay well-organized; the writing clear and grammatically correct? (15%)
- Is the research and use of references effective and relevant? (10%)
- Does the essay follow contest rules and guidelines? (10%)

Submit essay as a PDF to: Chris Swarth at cswarth10@gmail.com

Deadline: May 24, 2020

The annual WFO student membership fee is \$10.

Payment may be made on-line, at <https://www.westernfieldornithologists.org>

A check made payable to Western Field Ornithologists may be sent to:

Suzanne Carota, Treasurer WFO

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