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10th Grade
Summit Learning Charter
Portland, Oregon

What Drives Me?

Nature and wildlife have intrigued me ever since I was young. I remember eagerly looking forward to family camping adventures along the Santiam river or the Oregon coast. On weekends, I ambled through wildlife refuges and hiked buttes looking for vultures and grazing deer. Growing up with limitations due to an autoimmune disease, I found a sense of peace engaging in the natural world. As a teen, this passion has fueled my desire for deeper knowledge in ecology, while allowing me to contribute to scientific research.

When I was two years old, I was diagnosed with polyarticular Juvenile Arthritis. There were times in my teenage years that my knees would ache severely while hiking, forcing me to sit and draw wildlife while my family finished without me. During those days of frustration and pain, I grew... in more ways than one.

Sitting beside gurgling streams, I learned to really listen and see the world around me. I quickly became fascinated with the varieties of local birds and swiftly dove into the fascinating world of ornithology. After hours of leafing through detailed field guides and meandering with binoculars, I memorized the quiet *peep* of a hidden kinglet or searched for the Steller's Jay mimicking hawk screams. My notebooks are now full of drawings of Common Goldeneye drakes swimming in the river, photographs of chickadees sneaking bites of my home-made suet, and descriptive paragraphs from when I encountered the stunning, rare Mandarin Duck.

Each time I go outside I discover something new, not only about nature, but also about myself. While searching through overgrown orchards for an elusive woodpecker, I unwind from my day and look at stressful situations from new perspectives. Moreover, relationships with my

family and friends flourish as we amble through fields, startling meadowlarks out of the swaying grass.

Additionally, for the last two years I have been collecting data for ornithological organizations as a citizen scientist. I have submitted over 700 species checklists, from local and international locations, recording the varieties of birds I encounter, quantity, breeding codes, and documentation such as photos and audio recordings. My data has already been used in multiple projects monitoring how COVID-19 lockdowns are affecting bird populations, creating migration maps for waterfowl, and tracking Bald Eagle nesting sites in the United States. I've enjoyed participating in surveys and educational opportunities, knowing that my data is benefiting the local scientific communities.

What began as a limitation due to arthritis has become a driving passion to learn about the unique world around me. Currently as a sophomore in high school and an early college student at Mt. Hood Community College, I am pursuing an Associates in Biology with the intent to complete a Bachelors in Wildlife Biology and Ornithology. Exploring the outdoors and identifying birds drives me because I can contribute to science and share my excitement with others, encouraging them to start looking at the world through a new perspective.