

GREBE INTERVIEW: BIRD MIGRATION

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What is GREBE?

GREBE stands for Gator Ready for Exceptional Birding Experiences. It is a campus chapter of the Audubon Society and UF's bird hobbyist club. Grebes are also an order of aquatic birds, with the Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) serving as the organization's mascot. The student organization was founded in 2016.

BIRD FACT:

Grebes have partially webbed feet, known as lobate feet, which are placed near the backs of their bodies, making them expert swimmers. Unfortunately, they are not very graceful on land or in flight.

What events does GREBE do?

GREBE General Board Meetings include 30 minutes of lectures or activities. Lectures cover topics on bird identification and proper birding practices. In addition to improving birding knowledge, there are also fun activities like bird jeopardy or bird superlatives where members vote to assign titles to different birds. Afterwards, everyone goes out and scans the perimeter of McCarty Woods to listen to, look at, and take pictures of birds.

On weekends, GREBE does big bird watching events. La Chua Trail, Turkey Creek, Sweetwater, Bolen Bluff Trail,

Paynes Prairie, and Palm Point Park are all great places to birdwatch. During migrations a great diversity of species are visible.

What are good practices while bird watching?

It is good practice to minimize disturbances to our feathered friends. Keeping quiet conversation ensures you won't scare away all the birds. You should also avoid playing bird calls as the birds get quite frazzled and try to respond, potentially disrupting their feeding behavior. Male birds could get quite territorial if you play another male's bird call.

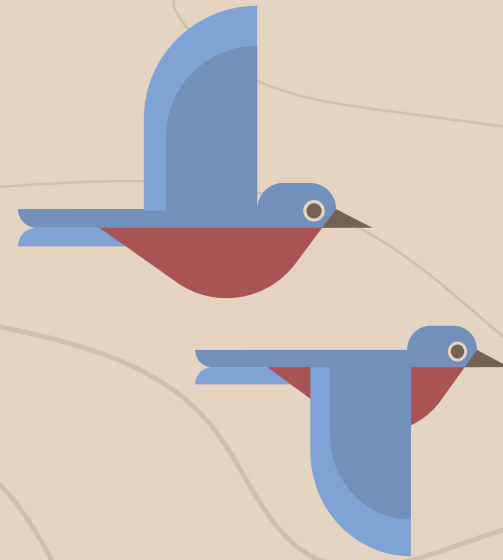
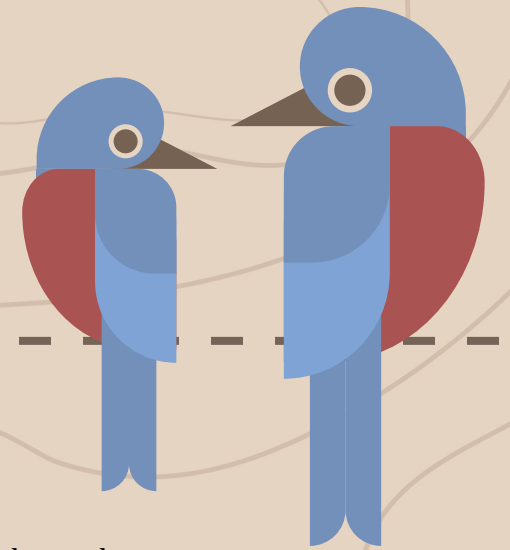
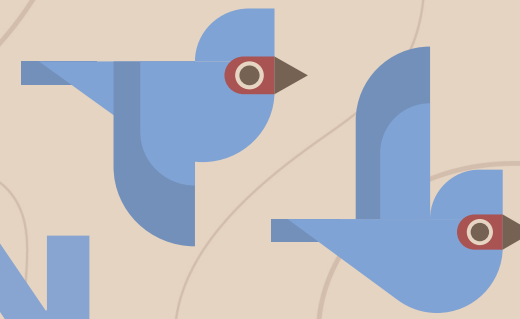
One handy tool to have while birding is a guide to help identify the birds. The Merlin Bird ID app is an amazing alternative to a conventional pocket guide. Merlin does both visual and sound ID, making it a useful tool to aid in Bird ID. The app can sometimes be inaccurate, so it is always good to cross reference your own skill and your peers.

What drew you to GREBE?

**"I LIKE EDUCATING PEOPLE ON BIRDS AND SHARING MY PASSION FOR BIRDS THROUGH THE CLUB."
-BRYNN**

"Joining GREBE was a good opportunity to make friends with other people that are knowledgeable and want to take a similar career path in Ornithology."

-Jay



What are typical migrations like?

Large migrations are most prominent in the spring and the fall when birds travel to find more suitable conditions. The fall migration is especially cool in Florida because the state acts as a funnel for migrating birds. Many birds travel through Florida on their way south. Since Florida is a peninsula, it acts as a path as the birds travel down to the Yucatan peninsula. During the spring on their way back up north, many birds travel up through Mexico and Texas.

How is migration documented?

GREBE participates in a Global Big Day where they observe and log migratory birds to help document the migration. This data is uploaded to eBird, a community science platform, where it is open source and useful to researchers. This international event is enjoyed twice a year by birders across the world observing the migratory seasons.

In addition to the Big Day, GREBE also does a semester-long bird count. GREBE members can go out and document the species they see by adding them to a spreadsheet. The goal is to see the largest number of unique species. GREBE has friendly competition for a trophy with birding clubs from other colleges including Eckerd College, Florida State, and UCF during the spring semester.

Grebe Garden for Birds

GREBE has established a garden for birds near the Reitz Student Union bus stop. The garden was created in 2020 by Jacob Ewert, a horticulture major and the president of GREBE at the time. While it is a relatively urban environment, the native plants along with some bird feeders attract a multitude of birds. In addition to providing fruits and seeds, the native plants attract insects that are another food source for the birds. Promoting native biodiversity gives birds more resources to aid in their migration. It's a fantastic place for both birds and students to visit.

What can we do to help birds?

At night, turn off lights or close shutters and curtains. The migrating birds get disoriented by light coming through windows, stadium lights, and other bright light sources, leading to injury. During the day, put decals on the window to help birds see that the glass is a barrier. The birds either don't see the glass or see the reflections of trees on the glass and assume it's a clear fly space, leading to collisions.

