

How to Recognize Loons vs Grebes

Loons



- Typically one breeding pair on lakes < 250 acres
- Feeds primarily on small fish and occasionally aquatic invertebrates
- Build nest on or right next to shoreline; may be difficult to locate
- Often bigger body size than grebes, stockier shape, shorter neck, and a larger head

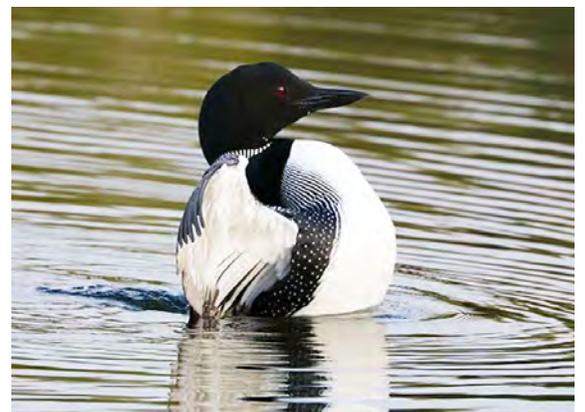
Grebes



- Lake can have multiple breeding pairs
- Feeds on small fish, crustaceans, aquatic invertebrates, and amphibians
- Build floating nests usually among aquatic vegetation and close to shoreline; very easy to see
- smaller body size, more slender, narrow head

Loon and Grebe Similarities

- Summer habitat: clear, freshwater lakes
- Winter habitat: coastal marine waters
- Arrive after ice melt in the spring
- Rely on sight to catch fish
- Legs far back on body making it difficult to walk on land
- Both male and female look alike
- Both male and female incubate and raise chicks
- Young chicks ride on the back of adults
- Chicks near adult size at fledging in the fall
- Highly territorial
- Adults usually leave before chicks in fall migration
- Vulnerable to human disturbance



How to Recognize Lesser vs Greater Yellowlegs

Lesser Yellowlegs



- Bill is short, just slightly longer than head length
- Bill is straight and thin
- Body size is slightly smaller than a Greater Yellowlegs
- Breeding adults have less patterned plumage on their flanks

Greater Yellowlegs



- Bill is noticeably longer than head length
- Bill is slightly upturned at the end and less narrow at the base
- Slightly larger body
- Flanks are more heavily patterned

Solitary Sandpiper vs Yellowlegs

- Smaller body size than both Yellowlegs species
- Thicker white line around the eye
- Duller, olive-toned legs
- More distinct white spotted pattern on the back
- Range extends most of Southcentral and Interior Alaska whereas the Greater Yellowlegs are restricted to Southcentral and the Lesser Yellowlegs is less common in Southwest Alaska



Solitary Sandpiper. Photo by David Hypes

How to Recognize Tree vs Violet-green Swallows

Tree Swallow



- White plumage does not extend to eyes
- Back and rump are blue
- Habitat consists of open areas such as wetlands and fields near water sources
- More tolerant of northern regions. Range extends across most of North America

Violet-green Swallow



- White plumage extends to cover face
- In good light, back is bright green with a purple rump
- White “saddlebags” wrap around either side of the rump
- Habitat includes deciduous and coniferous forests
- Range is limited to Western North America

Swallow Similarities



- Both species have dark beaks
- Black edges to wings and tail
- Both species frequent water sources to hunt aerial insects
- Males and females look similar