

Owen Martin

Owen Martin (he/him) is a first year PhD student in the Peleg lab who does research at the intersection of Biology and Computer Science, currently working on modeling and understanding how fireflies synchronize and interact as part of a complex system. I got to meet Owen for the first time in Fall of 2018 (?!) when he came to meet with some of the faculty and tour campus. He is a Boulder native who took a detour in the greater Boston area, before returning to start his PhD this year. Owen is super kind and I am so glad our program has him in it. I highly encourage you to start a conversation with him if you see him around, or ping him on Slack! You can even use the icebreaker suggestion he gives below.



What is your path to CU Boulder?

Owen came to do and apply for a PhD because he wanted to do Computer Science while he missed some of his roots in biology. His dad is a professor of evolution at CU, so he always knew what a great school it was, but didn't want to come here as a high schooler so he could expand his boundaries and explore on his own a bit. He went to Tufts in Boston for his undergrad, studying Biology and Chemistry. As an undergrad, he got exposed to Computer Science and programming doing computational research in a chemistry lab, and quickly fell in love and pivoted to Computer Science. After graduating, he was an automation engineer for a few years, before applying for the PhD here because of our great complex systems group. In his first application cycle, he wasn't matched with a CS advisor, but followed up with Dr. Orit Peleg to help with some research in her lab while working full time. He started helping out with some research on honeybee trophallaxis (the interaction and transfer of food among nestmates) that [Golnar](#) is also on. He re-applied after working in the group and is now a part of Dr. Peleg's lab.

How would you explain your research to a ten year old?

"I'm trying to figure out how and why fireflies flash at the same time." To do this, Owen is building a computer model that is pretending to be the fireflies. Special shoutout: His advisor, Dr. Orit Peleg just got a grant from National Geographic that he will be working on, building an AI engine to identify fireflies by their flash patterns.

If you could have an alternative career, what would it be?

Owen's alternative careers are still on the table! He thinks it would be awesome to be a conservation ecologist, or of course it would be awesome to be an astronaut. When he was growing up, he used to always dream of being a lemur scientist!

What is something you're proud of?

Owen is very proud of the fact that he chose to do a PhD at all. His determination and hard work in contributing to research after not being accepted in his first application cycle is admirable, and has paid off as he is enjoying the journey. This past week (at time of interview), Owen was virtually attending his first conference, and his advisor was gave a keynote talk that featured some of his work and flashed his face on screen. It was a moment he rightfully should be very proud of, and reminded him that he is doing meaningful and impactful work that others want to hear about.

What are some of your hobbies?

Owen loves rock climbing, and has been getting into trad climbing recently. He also paints wildlife (featured above) and loves birdwatching. He used to play ultimate frisbee competitively, and still enjoys playing. He also enjoys cooking and eating (often together) and reading in his free time. Generally, being outdoors makes Owen happy, and is open to just about any outdoor activity.

What are three improbable facts about you?

Owen essentially missed two years of school when he was younger (5th and 6th grade), his favorite food is nachos, and he has written a book about a road trip he took a few years back. The road trip was a few months long, and that is where we met the first time!

Icebreaker suggestions

Get to know Owen by asking him, "What about watching birds do you like the most?" He enjoys learning about how their personalities come out and suspects it would get him to reflect on the importance of being still and being in nature.

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