



Annual Report 2013



 **VERMONT CENTER
FOR ECOSTUDIES**
Uniting People and Science for Conservation

Mission Statement

The Vermont Center for Ecostudies advances the conservation of wildlife across the Americas through research, monitoring and citizen engagement.

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Dear VCE friends and supporters:

I went for a ski this afternoon behind my house in North Pomfret. I wanted to test the snow out after a brief moderation of temperatures. I was seeking that perfect moment when transformed powder turns to sugar. But my ski-oriented intentions quickly fell by the wayside as the March sun opened my senses to the upcoming season. On this mid-March day, spring was evident even in the snow-covered forests of Vermont's Piedmont. Temperatures had recovered from a low of -6 to a high of 35 under the powerful sun. I heard robins, chickadees, bluebirds and a few blue jays as I meandered around the hillside. Dense clumps of snow fleas covered the south side of tree wells, and I noted endless tracks of rabbits, fox, deer, coyote, porcupine and mink. Cresting a hill, I came upon 25–30 Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings gorging on an apple tree still laden with fruit from last fall's abundant crop. As I skied over to the tree, most of the flock flew off, leaving just a few undaunted birds intent on business. Under the warm sun, I decided to hang tight as well and have a snack. Pulling an apple from my pack, I couldn't help feeling solidarity with the waxwings, which quickly piled back into the tree and resumed their feeding frenzy. At that moment, I was treated to a gift. A gift no doubt commonplace for those willing to be outside on a late winter day in central Vermont, but for someone willing to wait and observe, arresting and absorbing. This is what I love about watching birds.

I am a casual birder and rarely go out specifically to see birds. Rather, I am outdoors and observe birds that inhabit the landscape in which I travel. I have often taken these encounters for granted, always excited by them on the surface, but rarely going beyond the encounter itself. My connection with VCE has changed that immensely. The scientific rigor and clarity of purpose that I have witnessed while being a part of VCE have altered my outlook on the natural world. VCE is staffed by an extraordinary group of people. What inspires me most about VCE is that such a small organization can have such big ambitions, such an extensive reach. To realize our ambitions, VCE will have to be innovative on every level, prudent with our revenue and steadfast in seeking support. It is my hope that the myriad talents represented in the greater VCE family will continue to grow, thrive and, above all, unite people and science for conservation.



Peter W. Brooker

Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends:

As scientists, all of us at VCE are intrigued by ecological mysteries, driven by the urge to make new discoveries. As conservationists, we're committed to keeping our natural world intact, preserving its integrity. As pragmatists, we know that VCE is a small cog in the conservation science wheel, but that we can accomplish a great deal in concert with others. Reflecting on our six-plus years of existence, I'm somewhat astonished at what we've managed to do. But, I realize that our achievements, highlighted on these pages for 2013, inevitably trace back to the relationships we've built.

Yes, we're a dedicated and industrious bunch, and that's one key to our success. We immerse ourselves in our mission, push the envelope at every opportunity, use resources frugally, and engage with our audience. I think most of our supporters – including many of you – consider VCE a very good investment. Despite the turbulent economy around us in recent years, we've remained fiscally strong, even managing to grow deliberately and strategically. We're a small, tight-knit group, and we consider that a real asset. We look ahead, but we never lose sight of the past or present, and the people who helped us get where we are.

There is never any question for us that VCE's core strength lies in our friends and partners. If we do anything well, it is realizing our vision of uniting people and science for conservation. The energy and sense of purpose we gain from our constituents – all of you – are what ground us, inspire us, reward us, and ultimately sustain us. Thank you – let's keep it up, there's a lot of work to be done!



VCE Leads Hemispheric Grassland Bird Conservation Planning

Sound Science,
Tangible Outcomes

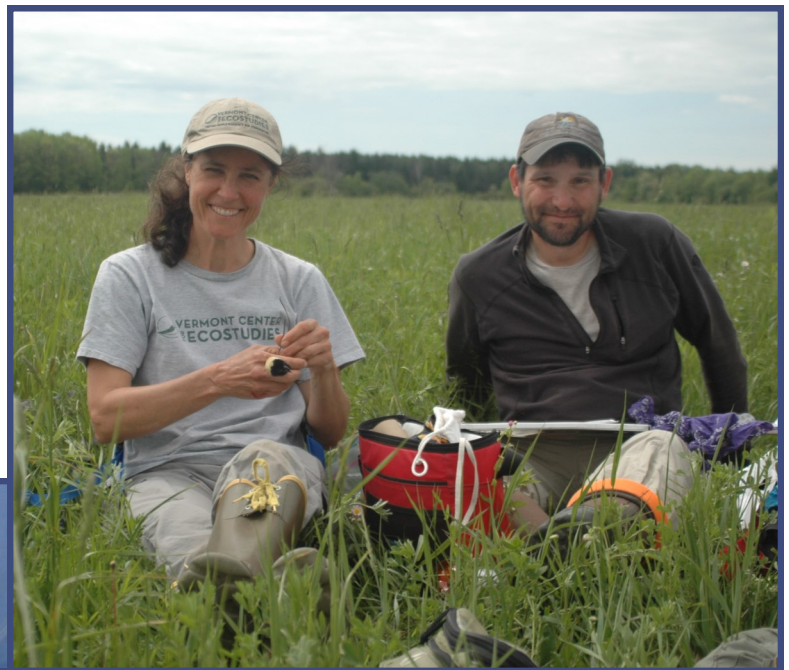
Following ground-breaking research fitting Bobolinks with geolocators in 2010 and unraveling the mystery of Bobolink migration and wintering habits, Rosalind Renfrew has become a leader in grassland bird conservation planning.

In 2013, Roz was chosen to lead a team in developing a “full life cycle” Bobolink conservation plan, working with partners and colleagues across the Western hemisphere on a comprehensive vision to stabilize populations of this declining species across its range.

Expanding the view to all grassland bird species, Roz is co-leading an international effort to create a full life cycle “business plan” – a road map of prioritized, high-leverage conservation actions to arrest the decline of these species and their habitats.

Plan Globally, Act Locally

Roz brought all of this work home to the Upper Valley of Vermont and New Hampshire in 2013, with a boots-on-the-ground project to conserve local grassland bird habitat. Roz and Jamie Sydoriak, a graduate student at Plymouth State University, are educating landowners about management options that can mean big gains for Bobolink nesting success.



The Ripple Effect...

VCE researchers' collaborations yield global insights and conservation strategies. Roz's 2010-11 Bobolink geocator research led to insights about blood parasites affecting endemic species in the Galapagos Islands.

The study's findings implicate Bobolinks, the only migrating songbird that regularly stops in Galapagos, in the transmittal of parasites to the Islands' native birds. In their 2013 publication, Roz and her coauthors describe the ramifications:

“Determining when and how parasites and pathogens arrive in Galapagos is key to developing conservation strategies to prevent and mitigate the effects of introduced diseases.”

VCE Empowers Local Conservation Efforts on Bicknell's Thrush Wintering Grounds

Juan Carlos Martínez-Sánchez, VCE's full-time staff member on Hispaniola, worked harder than ever in 2013 to render his position obsolete. His strategies included training local biologists to conduct avian surveys, using Payments for Ecosystem Services to engage farmers in restoring critically-endangered forests, leading partner organizations in the development of strategic and business plans, and assisting our conservation partners in developing grant proposals. Juan Carlos continues VCE's commitment to build local capacity for long-term conservation in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, with the goal of working himself out of a job!



Innovative Vernal Pool Mapping Project Documents Thousands of Pools

Testing a novel approach to map discrete, ephemeral, forested wetlands via aerial photography and follow-up field visits, Steve Faccio and a legion of dedicated citizen scientists completed Phase I of a multi-year project to map “potential” vernal pools and verify as many as possible on the ground. Nearly 5,000 potential vernal pools were mapped; 636 of these were visited, and 343 confirmed to be vernal pools. An additional 221 (unmapped) pools were found during field visits. The rare Jefferson and Blue-spotted salamanders were documented in 54 and 19 pools, respectively. Phase II includes on-going field verification of the remaining pools.

VCE's work often leads us to look beyond Vermont's borders, and our vernal pool work is no exception. Steve received a grant to compile existing vernal pool mapping datasets into a single, region-wide database extending from Virginia to Maine. This regional compilation brings together the work of dozens of stakeholders and partners, and it will provide conservation planners a regional perspective to better understand and safeguard vernal pools.

Vermont Loon Recovery Project Documents a Record Year for Loons

During 2013 VLRP staff and volunteers documented 81 nesting and 106 territorial loon pairs statewide, with 62 pairs successfully hatching 97 eggs and 71 chicks surviving through August. (For context, 20 years ago only 15 pairs nested and 13 chicks survived.) Outreach to recreationists and lakeshore residents, as well as placement of nesting rafts and nest warning signs, have keyed this remarkable recovery, but the efforts of over 280 VLRP volunteers have been its backbone.



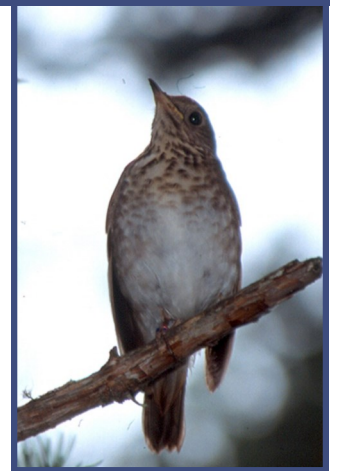
Vermont's First Bumblebee Atlas Concludes

This historic survey yielded > 10,000 field records and 3,000 historic records. The project established a baseline understanding of Vermont's bumblebee populations, identifying recent, rapid, and dramatic declines in several species; these resulted in 3 species proposed for listing by the state as endangered or threatened.



VCE Biologists Mark 20th Year Studying Bicknell's Thrush on Mt. Mansfield

Along the way, we elucidated the population ecology, habitat use, home ranges, and survivorship of one of New England's rarest breeding songbirds. We discovered that mercury is an active contaminant that bioaccumulates in the terrestrial food web. Careful nest tracking revealed a complex mating system and a close tie between Bicknell's Thrush nesting success, red squirrel populations, and balsam fir cone cycles. Our banding efforts both in Vermont and on the Caribbean wintering grounds have enabled us to document a male-biased sex ratio and winter sexual habitat segregation. All of this knowledge, published over the years in peer-reviewed journals and technical reports, has informed conservation planning for Bicknell's Thrush across its entire range.



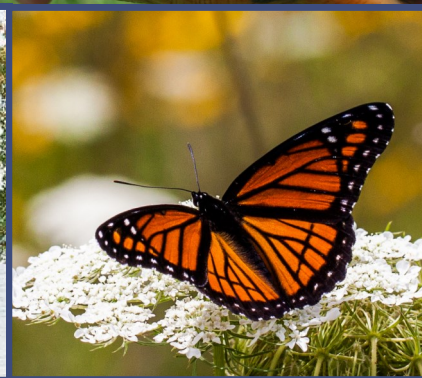
2013 Milestones

Vermont eBird Reaches its 10-Year Mark

The first state portal of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's crowd-sourced avian database has since become indispensable to many birders. In its first decade, Vermont eBirders recorded 380 species in 123,000 checklists, with > 10.6 million individual birds counted.



iNaturalist Vermont Launches
300+ citizen scientists logged
> 25,000 observations in the
inaugural year of this on-line
platform of the
Vermont Atlas of Life.



The 2013 Julie Nicholson Citizen Science Award

This year's award went to David Hoag, of Grand Isle, for his over-the-top efforts to help VCE identify, count and map wildlife ranging from birds to butterflies to bumblebees.

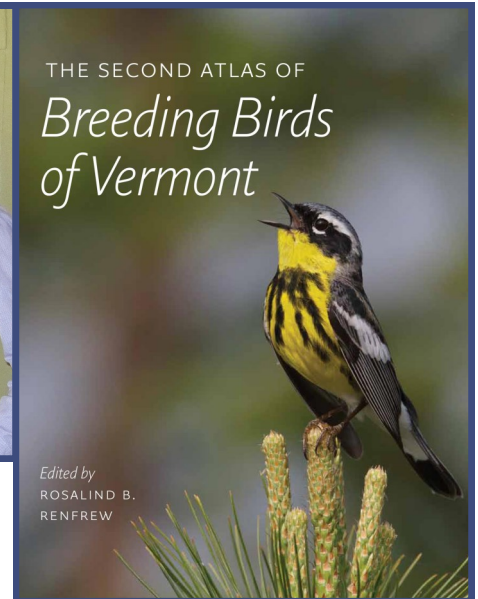
VCE Publishes Vermont's Second Atlas of Breeding Birds

This landmark volume reflects the extraordinary efforts of 350 volunteers, who spent 30,000 hours in the field and collected > 56,000 observations.

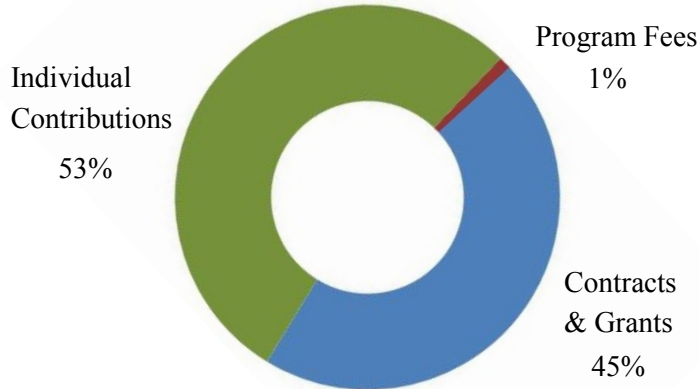
2013
Milestones



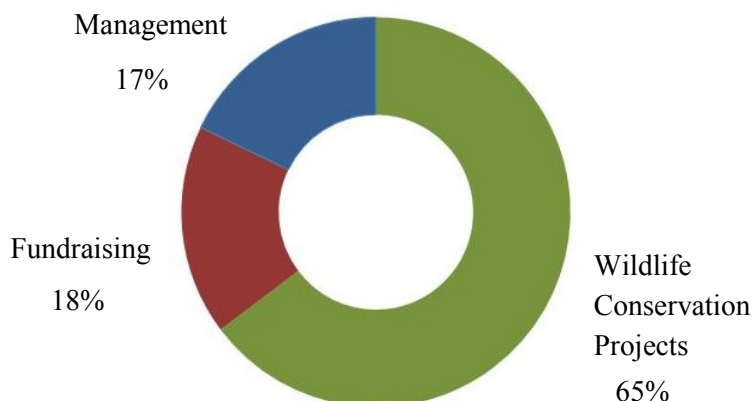
Whitney Nichols, Sally Laughlin, Sue Wetmore, Connie Youngstrom, Ruth Stewart, Roy Pilcher, Hugh Putnam, Ed Hack & Chris Rimmer, members of the First and Second Atlases of Breeding Birds of VT



Revenue



Expenses



2013
Finances

Revenue

Contracts & Grants	\$380,253
Program Fees	\$8,648
Individual Contributions	\$446,111
Other Income	\$2,456

Expenses

Personnel Expense	\$603,524
Contract Services	\$47,188
Publication Fees	\$20,596
General Office	\$98,738
Travel Costs	\$30,654
Sub Grants	\$31,005

Net Income **\$5,763**

Gifts in Memory

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Debby Haskins

Betty Barbarise

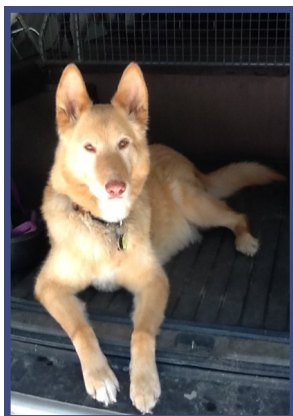
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Robert West Beyers, who spent every summer on the lake and whose family continues the tradition

The Theorin/Beyers Family

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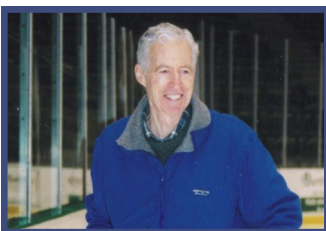
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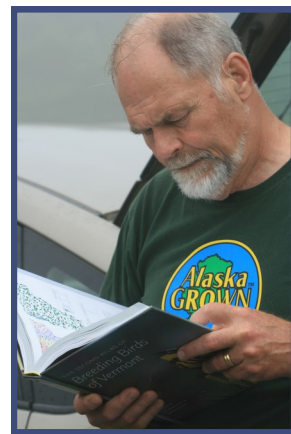


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