

Brief Birdathon Narrative: It was only fitting that several days of dry weather should end on May 19, an hour before 4 Green Mountain Goatsuckers shouldered light packs and donned rain gear in the Sherburne Pass parking lot. Kent, Steve, Spencer Hardy, and Chris struck out at 7 pm for the 2.5-mile hike up to Pico Camp, our traditional overnight roost at 3500' elevation. Thankfully, temperatures were warm and rain only moderate, with tomorrow's forecast calling for light showers. The woods were quiet, but we reveled in reverse-hiking though spring's phenology as we gained altitude. Hobblebush and spring ephemerals that had faded below were in full bloom. A few Hermit Thrushes and Black-throated Blue Warblers revealed their presence with dusk songs.

Soaked to varying degrees when we pulled in to rustic Pico Camp at dusk, we were uniformly taken aback to find 6 Long Trail through hikers ensconced inside, finishing supper! It's fair to say they were equally surprised. A potentially awkward situation was easily defused through flexibility and good humor – they graciously welcomed us, and we respectfully kept a compact presence. After some congenial chatting, all 10 of us were sardined by 9 pm into sleeping bags on the 4 bunks (Spencer and Chris sharing one), with Kent and Steve arrayed on the narrow floor below. Remarkably, snoring was minimal, and we all slept, even if fitfully. Rain stopped after midnight, though wind continued to pelt water off the firs and onto the metal roof. A 4:00 am wakeup call had us dressing quickly and soundlessly. We were out the door by 4:15 – coffee would have to wait.

Headlamps aglow, we ventured for the Pico summit, broadcasting No. Saw-whet Owl calls along the wet, rocky trail. By 4:30 we hit the large swath that connects Pico to Killington. As wind swirled clouds past, we stopped and listened in the emerging dawn. Predictably, White-throated Sparrow provided our first tally, Bicknell's Thrush a welcome second. Within minutes, a chorus of Winter Wrens, American Robins, Swainson's Thrushes, Blackpoll and Magnolia warblers, and Dark-eyed Juncos kicked in. Yellow-rumped Warblers were close behind, and Kent heard two '*clink*' calls of our day's only Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. Summit, what summit? We had what we needed, so headed back to the hut, coffee on our minds.

Our hiking transect down to Route 4 was unusually quiet, but productive, and we pulled into Sherburne Pass at 7:15 am with 30 species under our belt. Roz met us there, immensely relieved to have missed the Pico hut slumber fest! Black-throated Green Warbler was far and away the most abundant songster during our descent, with Ovenbirds and Black-throated Blues a distant second. The hike yielded several Brown Creepers, Golden-crowned Kinglets (even Rimmer heard them...), and the day's only Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Shedding wet layers for biking attire, we coasted the long downhill to a deli just before Rt. 100, where we devoured egg sandwiches and more coffee. We were pedaling again by 8:15 am, fortified, warmed, ready to build our list.

Kent Pond yielded a nesting Common Loon pair on the island (fittingly surrounded by VCE sign buoys), but no swallows or bona fide migrants. However, the Killington wetlands produced their usual slew of good birds, including a splendid look at an American Bittern in flight. We couldn't coax a rail out of the marshes but were glad to find a Solitary Sandpiper. This area also yielded our only American Black Duck, several Alder Flycatchers, a Northern Waterthrush, an early E. Wood Pewee, and the day's only Red-tailed Hawk. Turning our bikes south on Rt. 4/100, we met our 'pit crew', Melissa and Sara, who doled out snacks and one-liners. Weather was gradually warming, and avian vocal activity was staying strong. Woodward Reservoir produced Double-crested Cormorant and Ring-billed Gull, plus another VCE-protected loon on its platform nest. Jane and Jude joined us for a hearty lunch on the grass at Hawk Mountain Resort in Plymouth. Our list stood at 82 species – hitting the century mark would be a stretch, with several long, grueling hills still to come. Not to worry. We found Least Sandpiper and Killdeer on a Rescue Lake sandbar, and a Great Crested Flycatcher nearby. The killer hill up from Echo Lake produced its usual reward at the top of singing Bobolinks and Savannah Sparrows. Colby Pond was dead, so we pushed on for Woodstock. A Broad-winged Hawk flew across the road, snake in talons.

The next 4 hours featured a mix of biking pain and birding gain. Sagging energy during our cross-country trek to Route 106 was periodically revived by new finds: counter-calling Barred Owls, a drumming grouse, Downy Woodpecker. The So. Woodstock general store provided our only House Finch. Up and over Church Hill, we managed to pull out a Rufous-sided Towhee amidst cracking rifle shots at the Woodstock Gun Club. We tumbled into Kent's house at 6 pm to inhale pizza and rhubarb pie, and hear our only House Wren. Our list stood at a tantalizing 95. We split up for post-pizza sleuthing en route to our homes. Everyone came through: Roz with woodcock and snipe, Kent and Steve with Common Merganser, Spencer and Chris with Green Heron, No. Rough-winged Swallow, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown Thrasher, and a female E. Bluebird on her nest (visible by flashlight after dark). Another epic Birdathon on the books – 103 species. And, we missed Rock Pigeon!

VCE Birdathon – Pico Mt. to Woodstock, VT
20 May 2013, 4:30 am–6:00 pm
~45 miles on bikes and ~4 miles on foot
Team: Steve Faccio, Spencer Hardy, Kent McFarland,
Roz Renfrew, and Chris Rimmer

Birds:

Common Loon	Least Flycatcher	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Double-crested Cormorant	Eastern Phoebe	Blk-throated Green Warbler
American Bittern	Great Crested Flycatcher	Blackburnian Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Eastern Kingbird	Blackpoll Warbler
Green Heron	Blue-headed Vireo	
Turkey Vulture	Warbling Vireo	Black-and-white Warbler
Canada Goose	Red-eyed Vireo	American Redstart
Wood Duck	Blue Jay	Ovenbird
American Black Duck	American Crow	Northern Waterthrush
Mallard	Common Raven	Louisiana Waterthrush
Hooded Merganser	Tree Swallow	Common Yellowthroat
Common Merganser	No. Rough-winged Swallow	Scarlet Tanager
Broad-winged Hawk	Barn Swallow	Eastern Towhee
Red-tailed Hawk	Black-capped Chickadee	Chipping Sparrow
Ruffed Grouse	Tufted Titmouse	Savannah Sparrow
Wild Turkey	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Song Sparrow
Killdeer	Brown Creeper	Swamp Sparrow
Solitary Sandpiper	House Wren	White-throated Sparrow
Spotted Sandpiper	Winter Wren	Dark-eyed Junco
Least Sandpiper	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Northern Cardinal
Common Snipe	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
American Woodcock	Eastern Bluebird	Indigo Bunting
Ring-billed Gull	Veery	Bobolink
Mourning Dove	Bicknell's Thrush	Red-winged Blackbird
Barred Owl	Swainson's Thrush	Common Grackle
Chimney Swift	Hermit Thrush	Brown-headed Cowbird
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Wood Thrush	Baltimore Oriole
Belted Kingfisher	American Robin	Purple Finch
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Gray Catbird	House Finch
Downy Woodpecker	Brown Thrasher	American Goldfinch
Hairy Woodpecker	European Starling	House Sparrow
Northern Flicker	Nashville Warbler	
Pileated Woodpecker	Northern Parula	
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Yellow Warbler	
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Chestnut-sided Warbler	
Alder Flycatcher	Magnolia Warbler	
	Black-throated Blue Warbler	

Total: 103 bird species