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

**Total: 103 bird species**