

## Alexander Dickey – A Tribute

Alexander Dickey was a young man who inhabited the world intensely and on many fronts. Very little that crossed his path failed to reach his heart. He was a lover of beauty, in all its incarnations—a hummingbird, a new crocus, a verse of poetry, a riff of Spanish guitar. To walk in the woods with him was to experience nature on another level: the flora, the birdsong, the lichen on the underside of downed trees—he would tell you of their ecology and lifespan, their common and Latin names, any special lore they might possess, often more than you wanted or needed to know. But it was a delight to listen anyway, because his love for it all was so clear.



Nature, language, and music—they were where Alex found refuge from a world that often seemed too much. A mostly self-taught guitarist, he married this skill with his love of Spanish culture to create modern classical compositions; he read translations of ancient Chinese poetry and wrote his own verse in the same spare, ascetic style. His travels in Spain, Ecuador, the Mediterranean, and the American Southwest widened his worldview, added to his store of natural beauty, and left him speaking near-fluent Spanish.

For all this, he was largely unmindful of his gifts. Temperamentally resistant to receiving even the mildest praise, he went through life largely unrewarded by the world. Although kind and giving almost to a fault—and dearly loved by those who knew him well—he had a difficult time staying ahead of the depression that, increasingly as time passed, afflicted him.

And so it was that on a mild October day in 2013, at twenty-eight years old, alone in the woods of western Massachusetts, Alex took his life.

Almost certainly, his choice of the woods was not random. For it was to nature, more than anything else, that Alex looked for company, and for satisfaction. In the late 2000s, doing field and office work as a volunteer intern here at the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE), his energy and enthusiasm were infectious, as was the cheerful zest with which he attacked any project to which we set him. Whether warding off black fly clouds on a Bicknell's Thrush field trip in the Catskills or diligently organizing reams of data on nesting Hispaniolan cloud forest birds—whatever the task, Alex was in his element, and it showed.

It is for this reason that we here at VCE, as well as his friends and family, all feel that there could be no more fitting tribute to Alex's legacy—and none that would please him more—than to establish an annual conservation internship that will make possible a continuance of this work that brought him such joy. We are pleased to again offer the Alexander Dickey Conservation Internship in 2019, and to seek applications for the fourth year of this exceptional opportunity.

## **2019 APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

### **Alexander Dickey Conservation Internship**

VCE seeks applicants for a 12-week, field-based conservation science internship—the Alexander Dickey Conservation Internship—for the period **20 May to 9 August 2019**. The position will involve immersion in many aspects of VCE’s diverse wildlife research and monitoring projects, including (but not limited to) the Vermont Loon Conservation Project, Mountain Birdwatch, long-term bird banding on the Mt. Mansfield ridgeline, and studies of vernal pool amphibian ecology. The opportunity to present a nature program and/or lead a nature walk at a therapeutic community will help develop public speaking skills. Responsibilities will vary from day to day and week to week, but will include field work and office-based tasks such as error-checking and digitization of data.

Applicants should be in relatively early stages of a career trajectory that demonstrates a genuine commitment to conservation of flora and fauna. While passion for natural history, motivation to learn and eagerness to contribute are far more important qualities than experience, successful candidates will be able to highlight a proven dedication to conservation biology. Above all else, we seek applicants who are eager to grow and develop as conservation professionals, who will apply the skills they gain in this internship to advance VCE’s mission, and who express a personal connection to nature that reflects the solace and delight it offered to Alexander. Special consideration will be given to candidates who, like Alexander, blend a love of the humanities with this felt connection to nature, and/or have some personal experience, awareness, or empathy with the type of suffering Alex endured.

Qualifications include some formal education in wildlife biology, ecology, or a closely related field. Also required is a willingness to work unpredictable hours in demanding field conditions, to physically exert oneself, to work both independently and in a close-knit team of two, to be flexible in scheduling activities, and to show an abundance of good-natured humor. Applicants should be prepared to travel independently around Vermont and occasionally to surrounding states, to conduct loon surveys via kayak (training will be provided), and to conduct hiking-based surveys of mountain birds. Ability to work in variable weather conditions, traverse uneven terrain, carry upwards of 20 pounds in a backpack, to lift a canoe or kayak off of and onto a vehicle, and otherwise maintain good physical condition are essential. Ability to navigate roads with a roadmap (not relying upon GPS) is critical. Willingness to camp in remote areas and ability to use a GPS for navigating hiking trails in the dark to survey locations are also important. Prior experience conducting biological field work, particularly involving identification of birds by sight and sound, is preferred, but not required.

The intern will lead at least one nature walk and/or give a public nature program for residents of a therapeutic community in Vermont. No prior experience leading nature programs is required, but this skill is one that any professional biologist needs, so the opportunity to develop and deliver such a program will not only honor Alex’s experience with therapeutic communities, and deepen the intern’s awareness of their value and the people who benefit from them, but also provide valuable professional development in another marketable skill in the field of conservation biology.

This internship will pay \$500/week and is not eligible for VCE benefits. A reliable vehicle that can transport a kayak is a necessity, as frequent travel to field sites will be involved. Applicants must be able to supply their own backpacking gear for short overnight (occasionally multi-night) backcountry bird surveys. All personal mileage accrued during the internship will be reimbursed at the federal mileage reimbursement rate, as will approved personal project-related expenses. Housing is not included in the

internship, and it is recommended that suitable housing be obtained in the White River Junction / Norwich / Hanover area of VT/NH's Upper Valley.

To apply, please submit a brief cover letter with CV and at least two references by **11 March 2019** to the attention of Sarah Carline ([scarline@vtecostudies.org](mailto:scarline@vtecostudies.org)), along with a 500-word (maximum) essay describing why this internship offers a meaningful opportunity to advance your personal and professional growth, and how Alexander Dickey's described experience resonates with your own. In addition to promising aspirations as a conservation biologist, we are looking for someone inspired by nature, moved to preserve it, and someone who has either suffered from, has empathy for, is aware of, and/or curious about the type of struggle Alex experienced and that is not uncommon in our society. At the internship's conclusion, we will request a 1000-word retrospective essay about the experience's impact on you, how it has affected your professional aspirations, and how you feel it has honored Alexander's memory. This essay will be published in VCE's fall newsletter, *Field Notes*.