

## Alexander Dickey – A Tribute

*[Please note that the following tribute contains mention of suicide]*

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 2022 and to seek applications for the sixth year of this exceptional opportunity.

## **2022 APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

### **Alexander Dickey Conservation Internship**

The Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) seeks applicants for a 12-week, field-based conservation science internship—the Alexander Dickey Conservation Internship—from **23 May to 12 August 2022**. 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 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 can identify with the challenges that Alexander experienced.

#### **Responsibilities**

As a summer intern for VCE, you will be immersed in our diverse wildlife research and monitoring projects, including (but not limited to) long-term bird banding on the Mt. Mansfield ridgeline, the Vermont Loon Conservation Project, Mountain Birdwatch, and studies of vernal pool ecology. You and another Summer Intern will become a tight-knit team, working together throughout the summer alongside our senior staff of ecologists. Your responsibilities will vary from week to week, depending on which projects you assist. For Mountain Birdwatch, you will have the opportunity to camp in the backcountry of the high mountains, practice leave-no-trace camping (1-2 nights at a time; training available), and arise in the pre-dawn hours to conduct point count surveys for 10 high elevation bird species. Don’t worry; we can teach anyone to identify these 10 bird species by ear alone—you do not need to be an expert, just enthusiastic! For our Common Loon Conservation Project, you will visit remote lakes and ponds in Vermont to monitor loon activity, search for nests, and deploy and recover floating signs and nesting platforms. You will also engage in spontaneous conversations with residents and recreationists at loon lakes to gather their observations and share information and educational materials about loon conservation. On the Mt. Mansfield ridgeline, you will help set up mist nets, remove birds from nets, and band birds like Blackpoll Warblers, Dark-eyed Juncos, and White-throated Sparrows. Of course, it won’t be sunny every day, so you’ll be in the office as well entering your data, creating maps with ArcGIS Pro, editing videos and our website, and updating materials to help our community scientists conduct biological surveys. Attention to detail is essential for both fieldwork and office-based work.

#### **Qualifications**

This internship requires a mature individual who can operate independently and work collaboratively with another intern. You will receive training and frequently coordinate with senior staff, but the team of interns will often be responsible for carrying out the fieldwork without direct supervision. Strong and collegial communication skills are essential, as well as demonstrated good judgment in field-based situations. Some formal education in wildlife biology or a closely related field is necessary. Also required is a willingness to work unpredictable hours in demanding field conditions, physically exert oneself, be flexible in scheduling activities, and show an abundance of good-natured humor.

Applicants should be prepared to travel independently around Vermont and occasionally to surrounding states, and conduct surveys for montane bird species and loons. All necessary training will

be provided, but you must have a reliable vehicle that can both transport a kayak and occasionally navigate unpaved roads. You must be able to read a road map since field locations will sometimes be outside cellphone coverage. Good hearing and an ability to work in variable weather conditions, traverse uneven terrain, carry upwards of 20 pounds in a backpack, camp in the backcountry, navigate on foot with a GPS in the dark, and otherwise maintain good physical condition are essential. VCE can offer financial assistance for acquiring backpacking gear for short overnight (occasionally multi-night) backcountry bird surveys. Prior experience in the backcountry and conducting biological fieldwork would be helpful but is not required. Camping training will be available for anyone who would like instruction prior to beginning fieldwork.

## **Compensation**

This internship will pay \$15/hour and is not eligible for VCE benefits. 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 required that suitable housing be obtained within about 20 miles of the White River Junction / Norwich / Hanover area of VT/NH's Upper Valley. VCE can offer financial assistance for securing housing in these areas.

## **How to apply**

To apply, please submit a brief cover letter with CV and at least two references by **18 March 2022** to the attention of Emily Anderson (eanderson@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 identifies with Alex's interests and struggles. At the internship's conclusion, we will request a 600-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*.