

## 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. Alex took his own life in October of 2013, and this internship was later launched in his honor.

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 2024, and to seek applications for the ninth year of this exceptional opportunity.

## 2024 Alexander Dickey Conservation Internship

The Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) seeks applicants for a 9-week, conservation science internship—the Alexander Dickey Conservation Internship—for the period **June 11<sup>th</sup> - August 16<sup>th</sup>**. 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.

For 2024, VCE will support a total of four interns (one Alexander Dickey intern, one VCE Summer intern, two Future Ecologist interns; <https://vtecostudies.org/about-us/employment/>) across three different positions described below. Interns will have a chance to choose their preferred position, please include your ranked internship choices when applying.

**-Spatial Science Intern (1):** The Spatial Science intern will work with big data from community science platforms, such as iNaturalist, to help answer applied conservation and climate-related questions in Vermont and beyond. The intern will assist with tasks such as modeling species distributions, identifying priority conservation areas, and engaging in science communication by creating interactive figures/maps. This is not a field-based internship but the Spatial Science intern will have the opportunity to join field team as their schedule allows. VCE Data Scientist [Dr. Mike Hallworth](#) will advise the Spatial Science intern.

**-Field Ecology Intern (1):** Our Field Ecology intern will primarily work on two projects. The first project investigates how shifts in plant communities and environmental context drive changes in insect biomass (moths and beetles) and bird diets. This project involves assisting a team with weekly insect sampling (moths and ground beetles) and capturing songbirds in the Green Mountains. Secondly, the intern will also help with bee and butterfly transects to compare plant-pollinator networks in different managed green spaces. This internship will be >50% field work, which will take place in Vermont and New Hampshire. The intern will be trained in all field techniques, as well as insect pinning and identification, basic lab techniques, and data entry. VCE Conservation Biologist [Dr. Desiree Narango](#) will advise the Field Ecology intern.

**-Interdisciplinary Intern (2):** Two interns will have the opportunity to work with four VCE staffers for approximately two weeks each and gain experience in various topics relevant to conservation science. With Conservation Biologist [Dr. Jason Hill](#), interns will help sample insects and ticks in backyards, helping us understand how tick management chemicals impact pollinator populations. Interns will also be deploying, and recovering, insect sampling equipment on the tops of mountains in Vermont and New Hampshire and receive training on sorting and identifying insects under a microscope. While working with Conservation Biologist [Eric Hanson](#), interns will use a kayak or canoe on remote lakes and ponds to monitor loon activity, search for nests, and deploy and recover floating signs and nesting platforms. The loon work will also necessitate spontaneous conversations with residents and recreationists at loon lakes to both gather their observations and share information and educational materials. Communications Director [Emily Anderson](#) will lead the interns in turning field experiences

into social media posts and blog articles, learning to use communications software tools, and honing skills as a science writer. With Science Director Dr. Ryan Rebozo, interns will work on implementing materials and strategies for place-based science education and community science projects, in addition to exploring science-to-policy initiatives VCE is involved in (with Communications Director Emily Anderson). Interns will get additional field opportunities assisting with sampling bees, butterflies, and grassland birds throughout the summer.

For all internship positions, responsibilities can vary weekly based on field conditions, weather, and priorities. Applicants should be prepared to travel to multiple research sites and be responsible for keeping detailed notes when conducting fieldwork. All four interns will have opportunities to work together, assist with an overnight bird netting and banding trip atop Mount Mansfield, participate in team-building experiences, and have exposure to external partners and collaborators.

Each intern will receive the training necessary to carry out their work safely, but we seek mature, motivated individuals who will begin the internship ready to learn and contribute. Interns should be comfortable working both alone and collaboratively. Attention to detail, good field note-taking skills, and an ability to embrace a varied work schedule and field conditions are other important attributes for this position. For field-based internships, the ability to work outdoors in various conditions, walk two or more miles on or off trail, and be comfortable paddling a canoe or kayak is expected. Also required is access to a personal vehicle to reach field sites and VCE office, 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.

### **Compensation**

Compensation for the Alexander Dickey internship is \$15/hour, and interns are not eligible for VCE benefits (such as retirement contributions and health care). All work related personal mileage accrued during the internship will be reimbursed at the federal mileage reimbursement rate. Housing in or near White River Junction, VT, will be provided for the duration of the internship. To encourage a synergistic environment, interns are expected to stay at this house unless previous arrangements are made. VCE can offer financial assistance for necessary field equipment.

### **How to Apply**

To apply, please submit the following materials to Ryan Rebozo ([rrebozo@vtecostudies.org](mailto:rrebozo@vtecostudies.org)) by **February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024**:

1. Cover letter
2. Resumé
3. One to two-page written statement 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 (to the extent you feel comfortable sharing). 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 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*.