

Collaboration

“I wanted to say thank you to you and your folks for your great highlight of our habitat stamp recently! It is extremely generous of you to support our efforts in this way, and a great help! Our shared mission is both more successful and more enjoyable because of our work together.”

—LOUIS PORTER,
VERMONT FISH &
WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
COMMISSIONER



ALLIES FOR AMPHIBIANS

When roads pass through wildlife corridors, consequences can be deadly, particularly for amphibians. In Vermont, road mortality is considered a significant threat for five amphibians listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The first step in alleviating this critical conservation issue is to identify amphibian road-crossing “hotspots” across the state. Toward that end, VCE teamed up with the Vermont Department of Transportation and two GIS modeling experts at the University of Vermont Spatial Analysis Lab to develop and pilot-test a model that can be used to identify potential amphibian-hazardous road crossing locations. When backed up by field verification, the model—based on landscape features, habitat proximity, and road characteristics—will help prioritize future mitigation efforts (such as culverts and “salamander tunnels”).

Spotted Salamander

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▶ Team VCE-BIOECO (minus photographer Nicasio Vina Davila) in Cuba's Cuchilla de Toa mountain range.

© NICASIO VINA DAVILA

FROM NEW ENGLAND TO CUBA, BICKNELL'S THRUSH BONDS BIOLOGISTS

Building on our newly-forged partnership with Cuba's Centro Oriental de Ecosistemas y Biodiversidad (BIOECO) in 2017, VCE returned to eastern Cuba in 2018 for our second field season in search of wintering Bicknell's Thrush. Despite abnormally rainy weather and numerous bureaucratic hurdles, our bi-national team persevered in Cuba's highest-elevation cloud forests and ultimately counted seven thrushes, successfully mist-netted two, and celebrated as our BIOECO colleagues placed the first-ever Cuban band on a Bicknell's Thrush! A strong bond with our Cuban sister organization only deepened as we hatched collaborative plans for VCE's return visit in 2019, and beyond.

Crossing Boundaries for Conservation

▼ Participants in a community planning workshop in the town of Duverge.

More than 20 years ago, VCE biologists discovered that the Dominican Republic's Sierra de Bahoruco National Park provides critical wintering habitat for Bicknell's Thrush. More recent investigations by long-time Dominican conservation partner Grupo Jaragua revealed extensive deforestation inside the park from unsanctioned agricultural operations and other illegal



activities. Left unchecked, these threats would seriously degrade Bicknell's Thrush habitat and could lead to the extinction of many rare, endemic species. Recognizing that any effort to reform management of the park needs support of the government and local communities, VCE and Grupo Jaragua pursued a collaborative planning approach, which culminated in the 2018 Strategic Conservation Plan for Sierra de Bahoruco National Park. This plan aims to halt illegal deforestation and implement collaborative management of the park's unique forests for the mutual benefit of plants, wildlife, and humans.