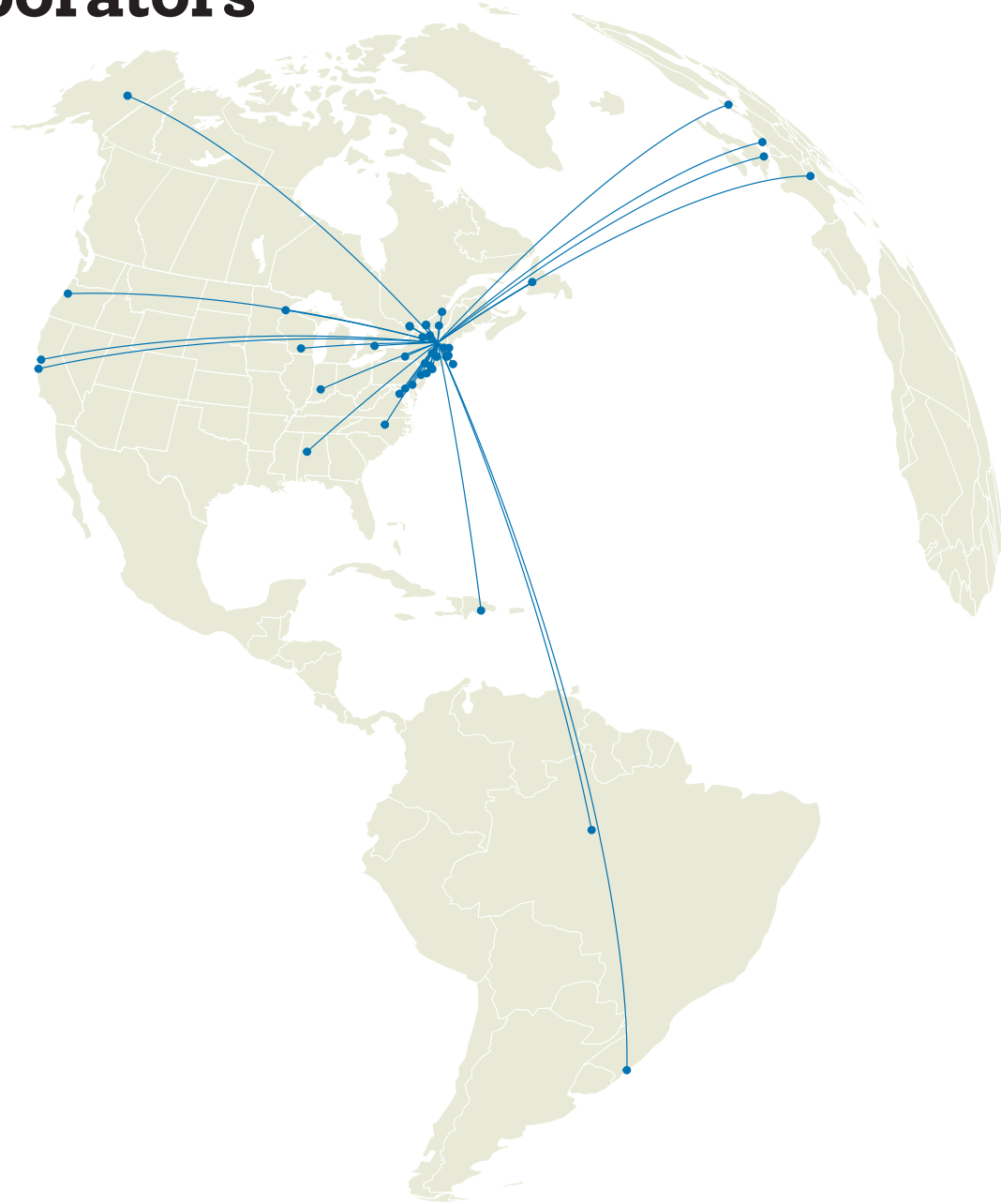


UNITING PEOPLE AND SCIENCE FOR CONSERVATION



Our Collaborators and Yours

VCE promotes biodiversity conservation through collaborations that span state and national boundaries. Every year we join forces with government agencies, universities, and other nongovernmental organizations on both short-term research projects and long-term initiatives, such as the Shorebird Collective, the Automated Insect Monitoring Group, the International Bicknell's Thrush Conservation Group, and the Status of Insects Research Coordination Network. Your involvement in our work, as community scientists and financial supporters, makes these partnerships possible. That's why we think of you as part of our international network of collaborators.



Susan Hindinger



David Mears

Dear VCE friends and supporters,

2024 was a year of remarkable evolution for the Vermont Center for Ecostudies. Thanks to you—our steadfast volunteers, donors, and partners—we've scaled up our ambitions and our capacity intentionally and decisively. The result is a more impactful VCE, ready to meet this moment of urgent conservation need with renewed energy, deeper expertise, and a larger, more inclusive community of collaborators.

The year also marked a significant milestone as Peter Brooke retired from the VCE board. Chair for 12 of his 13 years of service, Peter led VCE through significant growth, the pandemic, the retirement of our founding director, and our first major fundraising campaign. We are so grateful for his thoughtful and passionate dedication to our mission.

With your support, we completed our \$5 million capital campaign in 2024, enabling us to add key staff positions, improve our internship program, and create new opportunities for mentorship and leadership among the next generation of ecologists. Our research continues to inform conservation, this year through a nationwide collaboration to conserve wild bees and a new study about the interactions of native plants and pollinators.

This growth reflects a shared belief across our entire constituency that

VCE's work matters—and that it must continue even as traditional sources of public conservation funding falter. In this landscape, your private support is more critical than ever. It allows our scientists to pursue promising ideas before grant dollars are available, sustain long-term studies, and lead where others follow. For example, our moth and tick studies, which began as curious explorations, are now yielding essential insights into biodiversity loss and climate change. This kind of agility is only possible because of you.

Our expanded capacity has also positioned us to play a larger role in public policy and the national conversation around biodiversity. We are now collaborating with a growing network of policy-facing partners to bring our data and your voice to the places where decisions are made.

Whatever challenges we meet in 2025, we know that VCE is made for this moment. Our collaborative spirit and enduring commitment to conservation science are more vital than ever. With your continued partnership, we'll keep redefining what's possible.

With deep gratitude,

SUSAN HINDINGER
Executive Director

DAVID MEARS
Board chair

The result is a more impactful VCE, ready to meet this moment of urgent conservation need with renewed energy, deeper expertise, and a larger, more inclusive community of collaborators.

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Peter Brooke Explorers Fund Honors Legacy, Inspires Future Naturalists

VCE is proud to honor a leader who has helped shape our growth, mission, and spirit over the past decade. As Peter Brooke steps down after 13 years on our board, we've launched a new initiative to carry his legacy forward.

When Peter Brooke first tagged along on a VCE visit to Mount Mansfield in 2010, no one could have predicted the impact he'd have. But in the years that followed, he brought not only steady leadership, but also boundless enthusiasm, strategic clarity, and a deep reverence for nature.

The Peter W. Brooke Explorers Fund will support the next generation of naturalists through internships, youth science awards, and community science projects that reflect Peter's passion for wild places and the people who protect them.

"Working with Peter in common cause ranks among the most satisfying and exhilarating board experiences I've had," says Jared Keyes, another former board member whose legacy endures. "The best thing I ever did for VCE was to pull Peter onto the board."

The fund has already raised \$350,000 and is poised to power a decade or more of inspired exploration. To contribute, please contact Susan Hindinger or Laura Prothero.

► Peter's passion for wild places (right) and the people who protect them inspired the launch of a new initiative in his name that will support future naturalists.



A Conversation with Peter Brooke



© RUTH BROOKE

VCE has benefited in many ways from your leadership. What has your involvement in the organization given you?

It's given me a sense of hope. VCE is one place my mind can go that doesn't spiral into despair. Even when the data aren't encouraging, VCE shines light on what's happening and how we might make things better. That's a rare and valuable thing—and I think many supporters, whether they give time or money, feel the same way.

Is your passion for the outdoors and the natural world what drove you to get involved with VCE?

Yes—and once I got involved, that passion only deepened. My childhood friend Jared Keyes, an early board member, introduced me to VCE. Growing up together, when his brother was blasting Jimi Hendrix in the next room, we were listening to "A Field Guide to Bird Songs." I've always been drawn to bird migration and birdwatching, which initially attracted me to the organization. But once I became more deeply involved, I discovered things like dragonflies and vernal pools—even a vernal pool on my own property, which I monitor for VCE's Vernal Pool Monitoring Project.

One of VCE's summer trips sparked a fascination with moths. Now, I'm fully immersed

in "moth world." I set up my black light nearly every night I'm home, observing and documenting what shows up. It's not just fun—it's nourishing. Some people wind down with TV or a book; I end the day under the moth light. It calms me and engages my curiosity in a way that feels deeply sustaining.

You've seen VCE grow significantly during your tenure. Has the organization been able to retain its personality and some of the early attributes that attracted you to it?

When I started, there were just seven employees. It was the little engine that could—tight-knit, mission driven, and all hands on deck. That spirit hasn't changed. What's changed is that VCE has grown thoughtfully and progressively, without losing its soul.

I've always admired how VCE stays committed to long-term monitoring, even when other organizations might chase more fundable trends. That kind of work isn't always flashy, but it's essential—it gives us the high-quality answers we need to understand and respond to complex challenges.

How do you feel about the fund that has been established in your name and the endeavors it will support?

It means a lot, and I credit the board for the idea. I'm thrilled that this fund will support the next generation. I've seen young scientists come in with fresh ideas and tremendous energy. If we can attract and support more of them, it gives me real optimism for the future.

Any parting words?

Serving with VCE's board—past and present—has been one of the great pleasures of my life. These are thoughtful, committed people. Add in the ambition of the staff, and the generosity of donors and volunteers, and it's an amazing team.

© RUTH BROOKE



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Building Conservation Capacity in the Caribbean

With Bicknell’s Thrush populations down 50% over the past 15 years, it’s more important than ever to understand causes of decline and strengthen the capacity of local leaders to protect critical habitat. This year, we made major strides on both fronts. We continued our conservation research and offered innovative learning experiences to our Caribbean partners and their professional networks.

Boosting conservation capacity in the Caribbean took the form of three online courses and two in-person workshops at biodiversity conferences: one in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and one in Quito, Ecuador. More than 80 students and conservation professionals from across Latin America and the Caribbean received hands-on experience using the Conservation Standards adaptive management framework.

“As important as field skills are,” says Caribbean Coordinator Jim Goetz, “real impact comes when conservationists know how to work with partners to design and run projects from the ground up. That means finding a common vision, securing funding, developing workable strategies, setting goals, evaluating success, and sharing what they learn so that everyone can build on it.”

According to Goetz, many participants immediately start using the principles and practices to improve their current projects. To leverage and expand the gains even further, he is fostering a network of local practitioners

“As important as field skills are, real impact comes when conservationists know how to work with partners to design and run projects from the ground up.”

JIM GOETZ
CARIBBEAN COORDINATOR

▲ Participants learn how to use binoculars and locate birds during a Conservation Standards workshop at Reserva Zorzal in the Dominican Republic in January 2025.

who have already begun to share ideas and experiences to accelerate their learning.

Meanwhile, our research team continued critical fieldwork with support from the U.S. Forest Service International Programs, deploying solar-powered radiotelemetry tags on Bicknell’s Thrushes in the Dominican Republic. In past years we had collected more data on male thrushes than on females—simply because they tend to be more aggressive and thus easier to capture. In 2024 we increased our focus on capturing female thrushes to better understand their ecology throughout the full annual cycle.

Using the expanding Motus receiver network and transmitters that last for years allows us—for the first time ever—to track females throughout their lives, helping to reveal where in the annual cycle female survival is lowest and where conservation work can help most. Early results point toward a survival bottleneck for females during migration between the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. and Hispaniola.

WHAT’S NEXT IN 2025

- ▶ Collecting high-resolution Bicknell’s Thrush migration data from a new Motus station in the Dominican Republic, which will help estimate rates of overwinter survival
- ▶ Expanding in-person and online training in adaptive management and conservation leadership
- ▶ Fostering a Caribbean conservation network through regular practitioner-led learning activities
- ▶ Continuing migratory bird research at Reserva Zorzal, including an investigation into diet differences between female and male Bicknell’s Thrushes

Training Tomorrow’s Leaders in Caribbean Conservation



© KEVIN DERNIER

Professional development has always been central to VCE’s mission—whether through internships, fellowships, or informal mentorships. During the summer of 2024, we advanced that commitment through our Caribbean program, which focuses on strengthening avian conservation in the Greater Antilles. With support from the U.S. Forest Service International Programs, we continued training international collaborators, welcoming Dominican colleague Hodali Almonte to Vermont. Her visit deepened her expertise in Bicknell’s Thrush conservation by connecting her with the species’ full annual cycle and fostered stronger partnerships and brainstorming with VCE scientists Jim Goetz, Desirée Narango, and Mike Hallworth.

Loons on the Rise: Vermont's 2024 Season Breaks Records

Vermont's loons are making headlines—and history. Once nearly gone from the state's lakes, these iconic birds have rebounded thanks to decades of coordinated conservation work by scientists, volunteers, lake communities, game wardens, and dam operators. The 2024 season marked a new milestone in what has become one of Vermont's greatest wildlife comeback stories.

Four decades ago, the haunting cry of the Common Loon was rare on Vermont's lakes. Today, thanks to a remarkable conservation effort, loons have made one of the state's most inspiring wildlife recoveries.

In 2024, biologist Eric Hanson and the Vermont Loon Conservation Project—a partnership between VCE and the state's Fish and Wildlife Department—had reason to celebrate. “This year, we identified 157 territorial pairs and 123 nesting pairs—the most ever recorded,” says Hanson. Loons are now found on nearly every large lake in the state.

Of the 123 nesting pairs, 85 successfully hatched chicks, producing 125 hatchlings. Yet the season was not without its challenges. For the second consecutive July, heavy rains flooded nests, and 12 were lost. Chick survival dipped to 65%—below the two-decade average of 76%.

“Even with the lower chick survival, Vermont's loon population is growing,” Hanson says. “A decline in chick survival

is natural as loons compete for the best territories.”

Flooding isn't the only threat. Lead poisoning from lost sinkers and jigs remains deadly. This year, VCE's loon program rescued three loons, including one adult female poisoned by lead. “It's a heartbreaking but important reminder of why getting lead tackle out of lakes is crucial,” says Hanson.

The foundation of the project's success has been an extraordinary network of people. “We have thousands of loon-aware volunteers, boaters, and lake residents who have dedicated themselves to helping loons thrive in Vermont,” Hanson says. The effort shows no signs of slowing as the project approaches its 50th anniversary in 2027.

Beyond protecting nests, the work carries broader meaning. “In the short term, we're helping loons hatch chicks,” Hanson says. “In the long term, I hope loons inspire action on bigger issues—like water quality, protecting riparian areas, and climate change.”

Vermont now has one of the continent's most detailed loon datasets, and VCE's loon biologists collaborate with three continental working groups to share research and strategies. Each working group has published reports and peer-reviewed publications that have informed threatened and endangered species listings, loon recovery plans, and other conservation measures across the northern states and Canada.

“There's still so much to learn,” Hanson says. “But we have learned that creating a recovery plan and supporting its implementation can make all the difference for the loon population.”

“Even with the lower chick survival, Vermont's loon population is growing.”

ERIC HANSON
VCE LOON BIOLOGIST



© PHIL GENTILE.

▲ Eloise Girard, a seasonal biologist with VCE's Vermont Loon Conservation Project, cradles a rescued loon after her first icy rescue mission.

► A nesting loon checking out the work of Eloise Girard and volunteers as they place loon nesting signs



© FIONA MACLEAN

2024

BY THE NUMBERS

COMMUNITY SCIENCE
PROJECT VOLUNTEERS



MOUNTAIN
BIRDWATCH

111

BUTTERFLY
ATLAS

1,187

VERMONT
LOON
CONSERVATION
PROJECT

350

WHIP-POOR-WILL
PROJECT

25

VERNAL POOL
MONITORING

125

FOREST BIRD
MONITORING

29

EASTERN
MEADOWLARK
MONITORING

45



© ISABELLA SODDU

Plant Provenance: VCE's Boost to Pollinator Conservation

Six experimental gardens are sprouting across Vermont and New Hampshire, marking the start of a pioneering study by VCE in partnership with the Native Plant Trust. With more than 1,000 native plants from three different U.S. regions—the Northeast, Midwest, and Southeast—this project tackles a longstanding question in conservation: Does a native plant's origin affect its ability to support insects?

"This is the first experiment of its kind in the U.S.," says VCE Conservation Scientist Desirée Narango. "We're asking whether pollinators and herbivorous invertebrates prefer plants that are locally adapted. Until now, no one's really tested that in North America."

The initiative comes at a critical moment. Insect populations, and pollinators in particular, are in decline globally due to habitat loss, pesticides, invasive species, climate change, and disease. Planting native plant species can help—but much of the stock sold in nurseries is grown from seed originating from distant places. Scientists have long suspected that local ecotypes (plants sourced from the local ecoregion) might better support local insects, but studies testing this idea have been lacking.

In September 2024, VCE's plant provenance research team, with the help of many volunteers, planted gardens in six Upper Valley communities. Each garden contains 36 plots with five plants apiece,

▲ VCE Field Ecology Technician Onome Ofoman collects data at Cedar Circle Farm & Education Center, one of six sites hosting experimental gardens.

"We're asking whether pollinators and herbivorous invertebrates prefer plants that are locally adapted."

DESIRÉE NARANGO
CONSERVATION SCIENTIST

arranged in a randomized block design. "We are so thankful for the fantastic volunteers who came out to help us with our gardens!" Narango says.

VCE researchers will track differences in plant growth, flowering time, and insect visitation. To go even deeper, they are using cutting-edge techniques: testing the nutritional content of plant nectar and pollen and tagging bumble bees with tiny QR codes. Cameras installed around the gardens will scan these codes, allowing researchers to track individual bees' flower choices across different ecotypes. "These sorts of data are rarely collected," Narango notes. "It's an exciting new frontier in pollinator research."

Ultimately, the project will inform smarter choices about which plants to grow, where to plant them, and how to restore healthy ecosystems.

An unexpected bonus emerged when the team realized they had a surplus of more than 1,200 plants. In response, Narango and the plant provenance team launched Adopt a Plant, a new community science program involving members of communities across Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. They've been asked to plant and monitor the project's excess

► Desirée Narango and Ryan Rebozo running an Adopt a Plant pick up in Montpelier



© ONOME OFOMAN

native plants in their own yards. More than 700 people signed up, many of whom had never participated in a conservation project before. By expanding the study beyond the experimental gardens, these volunteers are helping scientists scale up their findings to see how these plants perform in a variety of realistic residential settings.

WHAT'S NEXT IN 2025

- Collecting and analyzing data from the experimental gardens
- Collecting data and volunteer feedback from Adopt a Plant community scientists
- Partnering with the New Hampshire Academy of Sciences to analyze nectar and pollen samples

▼ Onome Ofoman and VCE biologists plant garden plots at Sunrise Farm, where VCE researchers will track plant growth and insect visitation.



© KENT MCFARLAND

Field Ecology Technician Onome Ofoman

Onome Ofoman didn't start out in ecology. She earned a degree in electrical engineering from Stanford and worked in software development before deciding she wanted something different—work that got her outside and aligned more directly with her values. After arriving at VCE as an AmeriCorps member, she became a staff technician and managed the community science arm of the Native Plants and Pollinators Ecotype Experiment under the mentorship of Conservation Scientist Desirée Narango. With energy and strategic insight, Ofoman recruited more than 700 volunteers to participate in the project. "Nature doesn't exist in a vacuum," she says. "Humans have shaped it for generations. Conservation has to reflect that."

From volunteer recruitment and app creation to coordinating seven plant pickup events across Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, Ofoman has helped turn a complex scientific study into a community-powered movement. She finds joy in connecting people with the natural world just outside their doors—and in the messy, hopeful process of restoring it. When she's not in the field, she's usually on a trail, at the beach, or spending quiet time with family and friends. It's a long way from software, but for Ofoman, it's exactly where she's meant to be.

Vermont Atlas of Life: Revealing the Green Mountain State's Wild Secrets

In the digital age of conservation, the Vermont Atlas of Life (VAL) stands as one of the most ambitious and impactful biodiversity projects in the country. Initiated by VCE in 2012, the atlas has grown into a powerhouse of community science and conservation data, and now houses 10 million species records contributed by more than 30,000 naturalists.

“This project gives us a whole new lens on Vermont’s biodiversity,” says Kent McFarland, VCE co-founder and conservation biologist. “We’re seeing patterns we never could before—hotspots of life, shifts driven by climate, even new species we didn’t know existed here.”

Here are just a few of VAL’s 2024 milestones:

- **10 million records and counting.** VAL surpassed a major benchmark in biodiversity tracking, consolidating data from birds to butterflies to fungi.
- **New fungi atlas.** In partnership with the Vermont Fungi Scientific Advisory Group, VAL launched the state’s first comprehensive fungi atlas. With nearly 4,000 species already logged, it’s shedding light on a largely unknown part of Vermont’s ecosystem.
- **New species discoveries.** Dozens of species not known to exist in Vermont and one species previously unknown to science—the Appalachian Tiger Swallowtail butterfly—were documented, expanding Vermont’s known biodiversity.
- **Species distribution modeling.** A postdoctoral researcher began modeling species distributions using VAL data to inform land use and climate resilience efforts through Vermont Conservation Design, a framework for prioritizing lands and waters that sustain biodiversity and ecological function.



© FRANNI HOAG

- **Digitized historic data.** VAL preserved and published massive legacy datasets, including 28 years of bird records from naturalist Guy Waterman and more than half a million aquatic biomonitoring records in collaboration with the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation.
- **Continued butterfly atlas.** Year two of the Second Vermont Butterfly Atlas was completed, using expert and volunteer observations to map every butterfly species in the state and measure change since the first atlas conducted 20 years ago.
- **eBird Vermont upgrades.** The site tracks birding milestones like the Vermont 250 and County 150 awards, motivating birders to count birds statewide. With more than 750,000 complete checklist surveys submitted in Vermont, we now have abundance and population trends since 2007 for 320 bird species that occur in the state, including nearly all breeding species.
- **71+ scientific publications.** VAL-sourced data informed at least 71 peer-reviewed studies this year, influencing everything from endangered species listings to habitat protection plans.

By combining modern technology, grassroots science, and historical records, VAL is not just cataloging Vermont’s biodiversity—it’s actively shaping Vermont’s conservation future. As McFarland puts it, “We’re not just saving data—we’re saving the story of life in Vermont.”

WHAT’S NEXT IN 2025

- Continuing to rescue 125+ years of bird records through digitization efforts that help shed light on changes in avifauna in the past, present, and future
- Applying climate models to more than a million insect occurrence records to understand the velocity of future range and natural community changes in Vermont
- Releasing the State of Vermont Lady Beetles report to highlight the status of this beleaguered group and map a path forward for their conservation
- Working with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department to determine Species of Greatest Conservation Need and complete the Vermont Wildlife Action Plan, a guiding document updated every 10 years

◀ Laura Prothero, Megan Massa, and Emily Anderson iNatting at Windsor Grasslands

The Vermont Atlas of Life has grown into a powerhouse of community science and conservation data, and now houses 10 million species records.

CROWD-SOURCED COMMUNITY SCIENCE TOOLS



eBird

© KENT MCFARLAND



eButterfly

© KENT MCFARLAND



iNaturalist Vermont

© SUSAN HINDINGER

eButterfly Mobile App Takes Flight: A New Era for Butterfly Conservation and Discovery

Launched through a collaboration between VCE, the University of Ottawa, Espace Pour la Vie in Montreal, and Mila (a Montreal-based AI research institute), eButterfly is creating the first truly global network for butterfly observation. Since the launch of the eButterfly mobile application, participation has soared. In 2024 alone, more than 57,000 checklists were submitted, adding nearly 125,000 new records from across the Americas and beyond.

In fields, forests, and gardens around the world, butterfly watchers are quietly fueling a scientific revolution. At the heart of it is eButterfly—a platform powered by community scientists, AI, and a shared love for some of nature’s most vivid creatures.

“Every butterfly watcher experiences amazing moments,” says VCE co-founder Kent McFarland. “With eButterfly, we’re turning those moments into a powerful tool for conservation, science, and education.”

Users can track sightings, organize photos, explore range maps, and discover new species. In 2024, improved AI tools made identification faster and more accurate—one day, they may even flag unusual sightings for expert review.

International partners also helped drive eButterfly’s expansion. An outreach coordinator based in British Columbia and funded in part by VCE extended the project’s reach into Colombia and Panama. The app’s availability in Spanish and French continues to make it accessible to users around the world.

But eButterfly’s impact goes well beyond personal checklists. Each submission adds to an open-access archive scientists use to monitor species ranges, population trends, and climate-driven shifts. The project’s dynamic mapping and graphing tools allow users to explore data in real time.

“This has never been done at this scale for butterflies before,” says McFarland. “Over time, these data will spotlight species in decline and guide conservation efforts.”

As more people take to the outdoors, eButterfly offers a simple but powerful invitation: Pay attention. Record what you see. And help protect the fluttering heartbeats of the natural world.



© RODRIGO SOLIS SOSA

- ▲ An eButterfly workshop
- ▶ A heliconian butterfly (possible Postman)
- ▶ Far right: Yellow-banded Bumble Bee



“This has never been done at this scale for butterflies before. Over time, these data will spotlight species in decline and guide conservation efforts.”

KENT MCFARLAND
VCE CO-FOUNDER

© RODRIGO SOLIS SOSA

Helping Shape Vermont’s Conservation Future



© KENT MCFARLAND

In 2024, VCE scientists did much more than fieldwork and species monitoring—they helped set the course for conservation across the state for the next decade. By serving on Vermont’s key science advisory groups, VCE professionals are making sure that hard-won scientific knowledge directly informs decisions about species and habitat protection.

VCE experts currently hold seats on four of Vermont’s major scientific advisory groups—Flora, Invertebrates, Birds, and Reptiles/Amphibians—giving them a powerful voice in shaping the state’s next Wildlife Action Plan. This 10-year plan, slated for renewal in 2025, sets priorities for how Vermont will deploy its limited conservation resources and decides which species and habitats get the focus they urgently need.

“Our scientists donate a great deal of time and effort to these advisory groups—not just showing up for meetings, but preparing, reviewing proposed actions that affect endangered and threatened species, and providing detailed comments,” says Ryan Rebozo, VCE’s director of conservation science. “We do it because we recognize the value of sharing our expertise to shape effective conservation policies.”

The influence of VCE’s contributions is already clear. Our groundbreaking State of Vermont’s Wild Bees report identified 12 important bee areas and revealed that 55 bee species warrant designation as Species of Greatest Conservation Need. And thanks to the Vermont Atlas of Life, scientists had richer data than ever to guide the action-plan update.

“When the state government commits to recovery plans, like those for Common Loons and Bald Eagles, we see real success,” Rebozo says. “It’s exciting to know we’re helping shape the blueprint for conservation in Vermont for the next 10 years and beyond.”

Backyard Battles: What Vermont's Tick-Spraying Boom Means for Insects—and You

As more Vermonters turn to pesticides to fight ticks, a new study reveals the trade-offs: fewer ticks, but also fewer caterpillars, beetles, and spiders. The findings raise big questions about whether the cost—ecological and financial—is worth the results.

In the quiet lawns of the Upper Valley region of Vermont and New Hampshire, a hidden battle is underway. As more property owners turn to commercial spraying to fend off disease-carrying ticks, our quantitative ecologist Jason Hill wanted to know: Is it working—and at what cost?

To find out, Hill and his team surveyed more than 200 properties over the past two summers, half of them sprayed and half left untreated. For Hill, accustomed to studying remote montane forests where few people live, the research offered a rare window into a different kind of wild. “Backyards are the most intimate outdoor spaces in people’s lives,” Hill says. “To be invited into them is humbling because they’re trusting you with the place they probably care most about.”

Ticks may be small, but they are no small matter. As climate change drives tick species northward, Lyme disease—the most common vector-borne illness in the U.S.—is on the rise. Efforts to control ticks are booming, with the tick-spraying business growing in the Upper Valley by about 60% per year over the last decade, according to Hill. Yet, as Hill found, the promises many pesticide companies make often don’t hold up under scrutiny.

“Some pest control companies have unsupported and highly unlikely statements about the effectiveness of their services on ticks and the lack of harm to beneficial insects,” Hill

Amber Jones and Pia Carmen count invertebrates on a beat sheet for the Upper Valley Backyard Tick Project.



“Some pest control companies have unsupported and highly unlikely statements about the effectiveness of their services on ticks and the lack of harm to beneficial insects.”

JASON HILL
VCE ECOLOGIST

says. “There’s some really clever marketing—logos with green on them to make products look healthy and environmentally friendly. But there’s very little regulatory oversight and a lot of inaccurate information.”

The team’s findings—submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal—raised tough questions. Yes, spraying reduced tick densities—by more than 50%. But about half the properties, whether sprayed or not, didn’t have ticks in the first place. Even more concerning, the treatments didn’t kill just ticks; after spraying, insect and spider counts dropped too, with 20–30% of caterpillars and beetles wiped out.

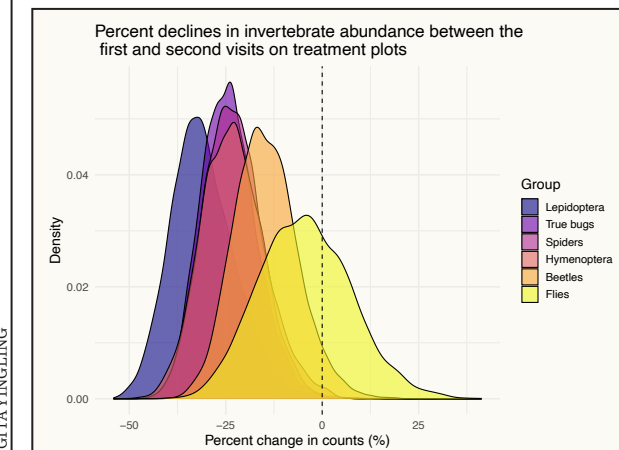
“Let’s say you have a large, half-acre yard,” Hill says. “Our models estimate that you likely have five or six ticks in the lawn. If pesticides kill half, you’ve spent roughly \$40 per dead tick and you’ve lost a quarter of your caterpillars and beetles too—the very organisms that our backyard birds depend on for food.”

What’s more, the study found that ticks quickly recolonized sprayed yards. “Whether you pay to have your yard blanketed with pesticides every month, you still have to behave as if you have ticks,” Hill emphasizes. “You should still be doing a full-body tick check every single day you’re outside.”

The findings also intersect with our growing concern about how widespread pesticide use affects pollinators and other invertebrates. These small creatures form the base of many food webs—and their loss may ripple upward, limiting critical food sources for birds and other wildlife.

Hill’s work, featured twice on Vermont Public, has already opened eyes—and he’s not stopping there. He’s applied for funding to expand the research, including new studies on how backyard birds might be helping ticks spread disease.

Ultimately, Hill hopes the research will empower landowners to make informed decisions based on science, offering clarity about competing claims regarding tick-control measures.



Staff Biologist Amber Jones



© STACIE MADDOX

Amber Jones joined VCE in 2023 as a tick technician and now supports multiple projects as a staff biologist. She holds a degree in resource ecology with a minor in wildlife biology from the University of Vermont, where her deep-rooted passion for nature blossomed into a particular interest in insect ecology. At VCE, she contributes to research on pollinator-preferred ecotypes and is deeply involved in Vermont’s second statewide butterfly survey.

“I love helping people connect with the natural world right outside their door,” Jones says. “I’ve realized how much I still have to learn and that I’ll be learning for the rest of my life. That’s what makes this work so meaningful—it’s never finished, and it’s never boring.”

From the Amazon Basin to Urban Spaces, VCE Scientists Produce Results

Our biologists have worked across the Americas for decades to understand and conserve biodiversity, using innovative methods and tools. By reporting their findings in peer-reviewed journals, they not only help develop solutions to pressing problems, they also contribute to the advancement of ecology as a research discipline. Here are some results that our scientists shared with the world in 2024.

Shorebirds | Amazon Basin

Jason Hill and a group of international collaborators found that 74% of shorebirds fitted with satellite transmitters in North America stopped to rest for up to two weeks in the Amazon basin during their southward migration (Linscott et al. 2024). The Amazon basin's rivers and lakes support Nearctic-breeding shorebirds during southward migration. *Ornithological Applications* 126:4 duae034).

Bicknell's Thrush | Cuba

Director Emeritus Chris Rimmer and colleagues reported that Bicknell's Thrushes rarely overwinter in Cuba, but when they do, it's in generally well-protected high-elevation cloud forests (Rimmer et al. 2024). Overwinter status of Bicknell's Thrush [*Catharus bicknelli*] in eastern Cuba. *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology* 37:1-11).

Moose and Squirrels | U.S. Northeast

Mike Hallworth contributed to a team effort that estimated moose survival rates across the Northeast—



Swainson's Thrush

© KIRSTYN ECKHARDT

part of a groundbreaking project to develop a new demographic modeling method using camera trap data (Sirén et al. 2024). Monitoring animal populations with cameras using open, multistate, N-mixture models. *Ecology and Evolution* 14:12 e70583). He also collaborated with Kent McFarland, Hill, Rimmer, and others on a study showing that conifer masting cycles strongly influence red squirrel distribution, which in turn affects nest predation rates (Hallworth et al. 2024). Boom and bust: The effects of masting on seed predator range dynamics and trophic cascades. *Diversity and Distributions* 30:8 e13861).

Pollinators | United States

Spencer Hardy and McFarland joined other biologists working at the frontier of pollinator conservation to show how many states have sufficient data to rank the conservation status of pollinators in 2025 state wildlife action plans (deMaynadier et al. 2024). Insect pollinators: The time is now for identifying species of greatest conservation need. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 48:3 e1537).

“The time is now for identifying species of greatest conservation need.”



Common Eastern Bumble Bee

© DESIRÉE NARANGO

Swainson's Thrush, Tennessee Warbler | Urban Spaces

Desirée Narango co-authored a study of Swainson's Thrushes and Tennessee Warblers migrating through Montreal that showed how green spaces should be managed to supply both native berries for actively migrating birds and protein-rich insects for molting migrants (Blanc-Benigeri et al. 2024). Diet of moulting Swainson's Thrushes [*Catharus ustulatus*] and Tennessee Warblers [*Leiothlypus peregrina*] at a stopover site during fall migration measured with fecal DNA metabarcoding. *Scientific Reports* 14: 9913). In a separate paper, she and her collaborators described how urban forests and residential yards differ from natural or unmanaged forests in species richness, prevalence of introduced species, and drought tolerance. Their findings will help planners properly evaluate the services that urban forests provide (Mejía et al. 2024). How do urban trees vary across the US? It depends on where and how you look. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 22:7 e2777).

For a full list of 2024 publications, visit vtecostudies.org/scientific-publications.

Science Meets Strategy:

How VCE Is Bringing Biodiversity to the Policy Table

In 2024, VCE opened a bold new chapter by hiring a science to policy manager to lead an initiative aimed at turning cutting-edge biodiversity research into real-world policy change. Rather than allowing critical discoveries to remain siloed in reports and journals, VCE is working to ensure that we inform the laws that protect Vermont's wildlife, landscapes, and communities.

One of the year's biggest legislative victories for biodiversity was the successful passage of Act 182, making Vermont only the second U.S. state to restrict the widespread use of neonicotinoid-coated seeds—pesticides long known to harm bees and other pollinators. Our State of Vermont's Wild Bees report helped catalyze the effort, and bee biologist Spencer Hardy, along with members of the Pollinator Working Group, provided the scientific backbone for the bill.



▲ Emily Anderson

© ALDEN WICKER

Meanwhile, VCE staff helped to guide implementation of Vermont Act 59, the state's "30 x 30" conservation bill. It outlines a bold vision: conserve 30% of Vermont's lands by 2030. VCE is analyzing the Vermont Atlas of Life's biodiversity data to help ensure that Vermont's conservation priorities are as data driven as possible. A new donor-funded postdoctoral researcher, Brian Kron, was brought on in September to guide this work.

Emily Anderson became our first-ever science to policy manager in late 2024. Her mission: to bridge the gap between scientific discovery and legislative action. "We're living through a time when skepticism of science is directly undermining solutions to our biggest challenges," Anderson says. "By making our research accessible and engaging, we enable better decisions for people, wildlife, and the places we call home."

From protecting bees to conserving landscapes to advising on the threats wakeboats pose to lake ecosystems, VCE is proving that good science, when strategically communicated, can drive sound policy.

WHAT'S NEXT IN 2025

- ▶ Sharing scientific insights and evidence in discussions of shifting federal policy
- ▶ Participating in developing Vermont Conservation Voters' Common Agenda
- ▶ Examining other biodiversity policy opportunities in Vermont

© JORGE TAMAYO

Resurrecting the Past: How Historic Wildlife Records Can Shape Vermont's Ecological Future

A long-forgotten trove of nature sightings has found new life—and new relevance—thanks to VCE's Project Phoenix team. With the help of dedicated volunteers, decades of wildlife observations by legendary alpinist and naturalist Guy Waterman have been rescued from obscurity and transformed into a scientific resource.

Tucked away in a corner of the Dartmouth College archives, Guy Waterman's handwritten records sat quietly for years—until VCE staff and volunteers launched a mission to bring them back to light. Waterman, a homesteader and keen observer of the natural world, spent 24 years documenting the birds and other animals he encountered daily on his property in East Corinth, Vermont. From 1974 to 1998, he chronicled more than 5,000 days of life in the woods.

"It's kind of incredible," says VCE Data Manager Megan Massa. "He was out there every single day, exploring and recording, long before we had platforms like eBird or iNaturalist."

An initial effort to bring Waterman's observations to light had focused only on bird sightings—missing the true breadth of the meticulous hand-drawn spreadsheets that recorded everything from foxes and snakes to salamanders, and even stray cats. Seeing their wider value, Massa and Conservation Biologist Kent McFarland initiated a full-on rescue operation.

Over three months, about 10 volunteers—including several who had known Waterman personally—painstakingly typed in the records by hand. "There's so much data being generated now, but we have very little historical coverage," says Massa. "That's why projects like this are so exciting—we're rescuing this amazing snapshot of the past."

The completed dataset has now been uploaded to



© FREELY LICENSED FROM THE FAMILY'S COLLECTION

the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), where researchers around the world can access it. It offers a new lens on how Vermont's landscapes—and its wildlife—have changed over the past half century.

The implications are significant. When combined with modern climate and land-use models, observations like these could help scientists predict how species ranges might shift in response to warming temperatures or habitat loss.

The Global Biodiversity Information Facility is an international network and research infrastructure funded by the world's governments. Its aim is to provide anyone, anywhere, open access to data about all types of life on Earth. VCE's Vermont Atlas of Life has been an official GBIF biodiversity data publisher since 2018.

WHAT'S NEXT IN 2025

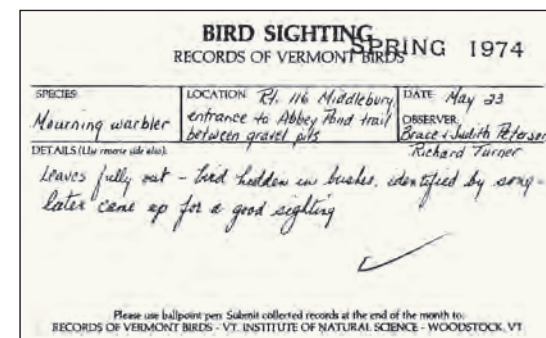
- Unearthing more archival records and putting them to work for the future of biodiversity

▲ 1976: Guy and Laura Waterman at their kitchen table in Vermont

➤ A 1974 bird sighting reported to the Vermont Institute of Natural Science and digitized as part of Project Phoenix

"He was out there every single day, exploring and recording, long before we had platforms like eBird."

MEGAN MASSA
DATA MANAGER



© TARA RODKEY

A SAMPLING OF VCE'S COMMUNITY SCIENCE OPPORTUNITIES



© MIKE ZIMMERMANN

Mountain Birdwatch

Each June, volunteers hit the trails to complete bird survey routes on 123 mountain ridgelines across the Northeast.



© SEAN MCCREADY

Loon Conservation

Whether you live alongside a lake or only occasionally visit your favorite pond, VCE offers several options for interested loon volunteers.



© KENT MCFARLAND

Vernal Pool Monitoring

In April, May, and September, volunteers visit and collect data to monitor "adopted" vernal pools following protocols and using VCE-provided equipment.



© KENT MCFARLAND

Whip-poor-will Project

On moonlit nights in early summer, volunteers set out on 17 roadside survey routes to listen for Eastern Whip-poor-wills and record conditions.



© KENT MCFARLAND

2nd Vermont Butterfly Atlas

Join us as we search fields and fens, mountains and meadows—even your own backyard—to document the status of Vermont butterflies.



© BRYAN PFEIFFER

Forest Bird Monitoring

Each June, volunteers monitor breeding birds on 31 sites across Vermont in one of the continent's longest-running studies of forest bird population trends.

Outstanding Community Scientists:

Honoring Terri Armata and Ava Purdy

Amateur naturalists form the backbone of many VCE projects, including the Vermont Loon Conservation Project and the Second Vermont Butterfly Atlas. Here we honor two stalwart volunteers—from different parts of the state and at different stages in their community science careers—who’ve made meaningful contributions to conserving loons and butterflies.

During the 2023 and 2024 field seasons, Ava Purdy of Greensboro, Vermont, traveled much of the state helping Loon Biologists Eric Hanson and Eloise Girard search for loon nests, build nesting platforms, and deploy warning signs to protect sensitive breeding areas. According to Girard, Purdy brought to the work some of the essential ingredients of science-based conservation: curiosity, initiative, and an instinct for making positive personal connections.

A 2024 graduate of St. Johnsbury Academy, Purdy now studies environmental science and other subjects at Middlebury College. After being honored as the Youth Community Scientist of the Year, she joined several VCE staff members at the Northeast Natural History Conference in Springfield, Massachusetts, where she was able to explore a wide range of topics, including herpetology, pollinator ecology, and innovative ways to teach ecological science.

Terri Armata has steeped herself in engaging approaches to ecology education since before Purdy was born. She began studying butterflies in 2002 as a participant in the First Vermont Butterfly Atlas and is among the most productive contributors to the second atlas, launched in 2023. Between the two atlas generations, Armata tallied thousands of eButterfly checklists and helped others make more than 11,000 identifications on iNaturalist from her home in Bennington, Vermont.

Armata’s work with eBird, the Vermont Vernal Pool Atlas, and other community science projects has earned her the 2024 Julie Nicholson Community Science Award—an honor that celebrates individuals who embody Nicholson’s passion for conservation and



▲ Terri Armata, 2024 Julie Nicholson awardee, with Kent McFarland and Susan Hindinger

► VCE Youth Community Scientist of the Year Ava Purdy and Loon Biologist Eloise Girard install a tube for collecting hazardous lead tackle from anglers.



At VCE, we’re inspired every day by the passion and knowledge of volunteers.

public engagement. Just as remarkable, says Butterfly Atlas director Kent McFarland, is that Armata’s dedication has made her one of Vermont’s leading butterfly experts.

At VCE, we’re inspired every day by the passion and knowledge of volunteers like Armata and Purdy. When community scientists like these join us in our mission, it’s hard not to feel like we are the real winners.

Friends and Partners

By supporting this work, you are *doing* this work.
Thank you!





© MEGAN MASSA

In 2024, we went all in—for wildlife, wild places, and the people who care for them—with the final phase of our ALL IN for Biodiversity campaign. Hundreds of generous supporters contributed to this multiyear fundraising effort that raised more than \$5 million to carry out the ambitious priorities outlined in our strategic plan.

It began with a simple realization five years ago: to meet the moment for biodiversity, we needed to grow faster than our annual budget allowed. Thanks to our community's generosity, we've done just that. Supporters like you have already fueled a period of transformational growth—our staff has expanded from 16 to 25 scientists, educators, and conservation leaders. This investment has allowed us to hit the ground running, implementing the strategic plan's goals without delay.

Your support is already making a difference. We're collecting and sharing vital data with landowners and policymakers, empowering conservation decisions grounded in science. We're building capacity to respond to climate threats, habitat loss, and species decline—not in the future, but right now.

And we're not stopping. With your help, the next five years will bring even deeper engagement, new research initiatives, and stronger partnerships to protect biodiversity across Vermont and far beyond.

"This campaign is an affirmation of everything we believe about our community—that people are not only generous, but passionate about science, conservation, and the future of the natural world," says VCE Executive Director Susan Hindinger. "Together, we're shaping what comes next."

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the campaign's architects and supporters. The future of conservation in Vermont is brighter because you chose to go ALL IN.

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Northern Vermont University
Raritan Valley Community College
SUNY New Paltz
Tufts University Wildlife Clinic
Université Laval (Canada)
University of California Berkeley
University of Delaware
University of Massachusetts
University of Massachusetts
Amherst
University of New Hampshire
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill
University of Ottawa (Canada)
Université de Sherbrooke
(Canada)
University of Southern California
University of Vermont
University of Vermont Extension
University of Vermont Gund
Institute for Environment
University of Vermont Natural
History Museum
University of Vermont Spatial
Analysis Lab
University of Vermont-
The Vermont Bee Lab

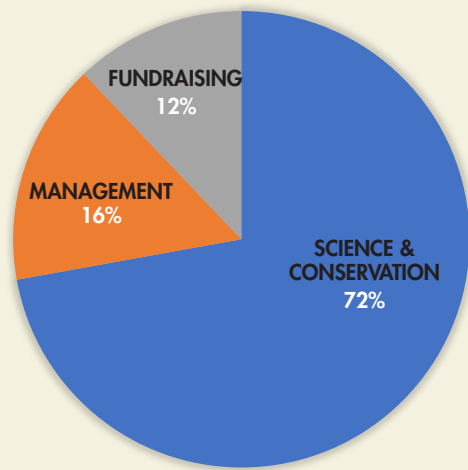
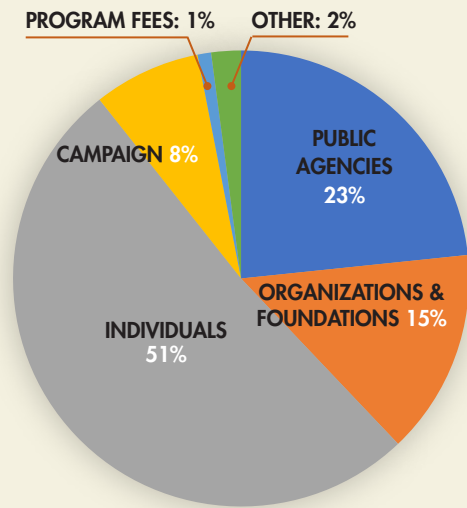
FINANCIALS

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS	AS OF 12/31/24
CASH	\$472,902
RECEIVABLES	\$496,353
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	\$969,255
INVESTMENTS	\$3,201,506
PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT (NET)	\$906,822
OTHER ASSETS	\$144,113
TOTAL ASSETS	\$5,221,696
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	\$267,832
LONG-TERM DEBT, LESS CURRENT PORTION ABOVE	\$561,434
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$829,266
TOTAL NET ASSETS	\$4,392,430
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$5,221,696

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

2024 REVENUE	2024 EXPENSES
PUBLIC AGENCIES	SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION
\$501,885	\$1,791,881
ORGANIZATIONS/FOUNDATIONS	MANAGEMENT
\$312,868	\$390,679
INDIVIDUALS	FUNDRAISING
\$1,105,298	\$300,723
CAMPAIGN	TOTAL EXPENSES
\$163,145	\$2,483,283
PROGRAM FEES	
\$20,679	
OTHER	
\$45,148	
TOTAL REVENUE	
\$2,149,023	

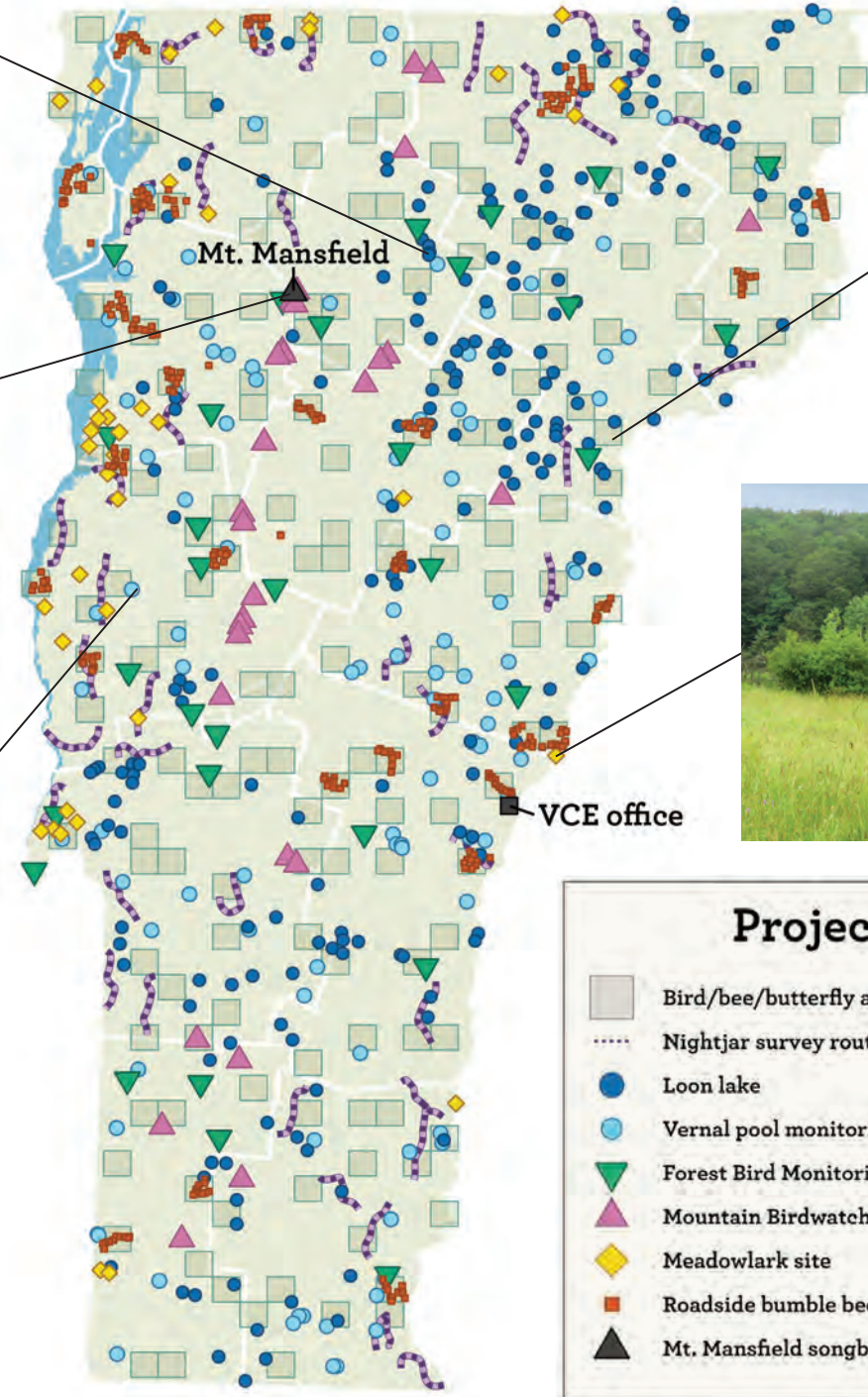


A NOTE ABOUT VCE'S STRATEGIC GROWTH

In 2023, VCE entered a period of planned operating deficits to enable strategic expansion of our science, conservation, outreach, and fundraising activities. Expenditures adhere to carefully vetted programmatic and financial plans made possible by the generosity of donors toward our \$5 million ALL IN for Biodiversity Campaign. Funds from this successful campaign are invested and then deployed—along with increasing revenue from grants, contracts, and annual giving—to support unprecedented growth in our work and conservation impact.

We've Got Vermont Covered

VCE's long-term monitoring projects blanket the state, with several projects and dozens of survey locations established in every county. The information we collect guides biodiversity conservation, policy, and funding decisions from border to border—and well beyond. To learn more about what we're tracking in areas you care about, visit vtecostudies.org/volunteer.



Projects

- Bird/bee/butterfly atlas priority block
- Nightjar survey route
- Loon lake
- Vernal pool monitoring
- Forest Bird Monitoring Program
- Mountain Birdwatch
- Meadowlark site
- Roadside bumble bee survey
- Mt. Mansfield songbird research





MISSION

The Vermont Center for Ecostudies advances wildlife conservation across the Americas through research, monitoring, and community engagement.



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