Spring 2026

Field Notes

Vermont Center for Ecostudies | Uniting People and Science for Conservation

A Master Gardener and His Habitat Garden

What started as a Monarch meadow has become so much more. • *Page 4*

IN THIS ISSUE

Saving the Song of the Bobolink | Page 3 • **A Good Excuse to Get Outside** | Page 7

Hymenoptera Hotels | Page 8 • **You Don't Have to Travel to Make a Discovery** | Page 11

Field Notes
Spring 2026

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Susan Hindinger

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
Dan Lambert

ADMINISTRATIVE
Mistie Boule
Toni Luff

COMMUNICATIONS
Alden Wicker
Fiona Lee MacLean

CONSERVATION SCIENCE
Ryan Rebozo
Emily Anderson
Eloise Girard
Jim Goetz
Mike Hallworth
Eric Hanson
Spencer Hardy
Jason Hill
Amber Jones
Brian Kron
Jason Loomis
Megan Massa
Kent McFarland
Desirée Narango
Kevin Tolan
Dana Williams
Sara Zahendra

DEVELOPMENT
Alyssa Fishman

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Flavia Barros
Celia Chen
Nan Cochran
Kari Dolan
Bill Hayes, *Vice-Chair*
David McKenna, *Treasurer*
David Mears, *Chair*
Alanna Ojibway
Jennie Savage, *Secretary*
Bob Taylor
Clive Wood

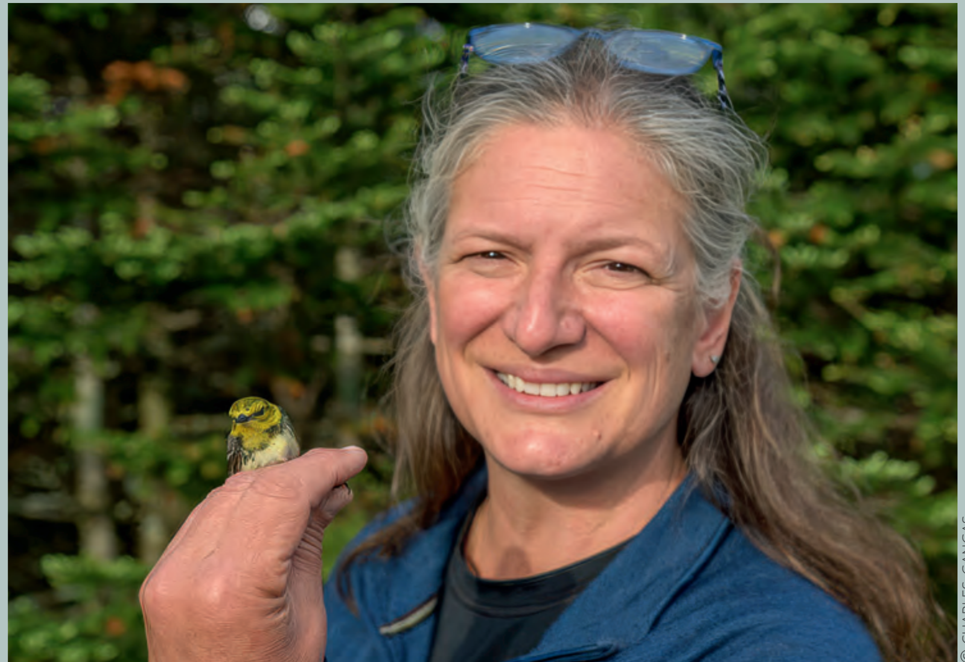
DESIGN
Jen Peñaflor

The Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to advance the conservation of wildlife across the Americas through research, monitoring, and community engagement.

Field Notes is VCE's free biannual newsletter.

PO Box 420 • Norwich, VT 05055
(802) 649-1431

Printed on recycled paper


© CHARLES GANGAS

VCE View

Spring is the optimist's season.

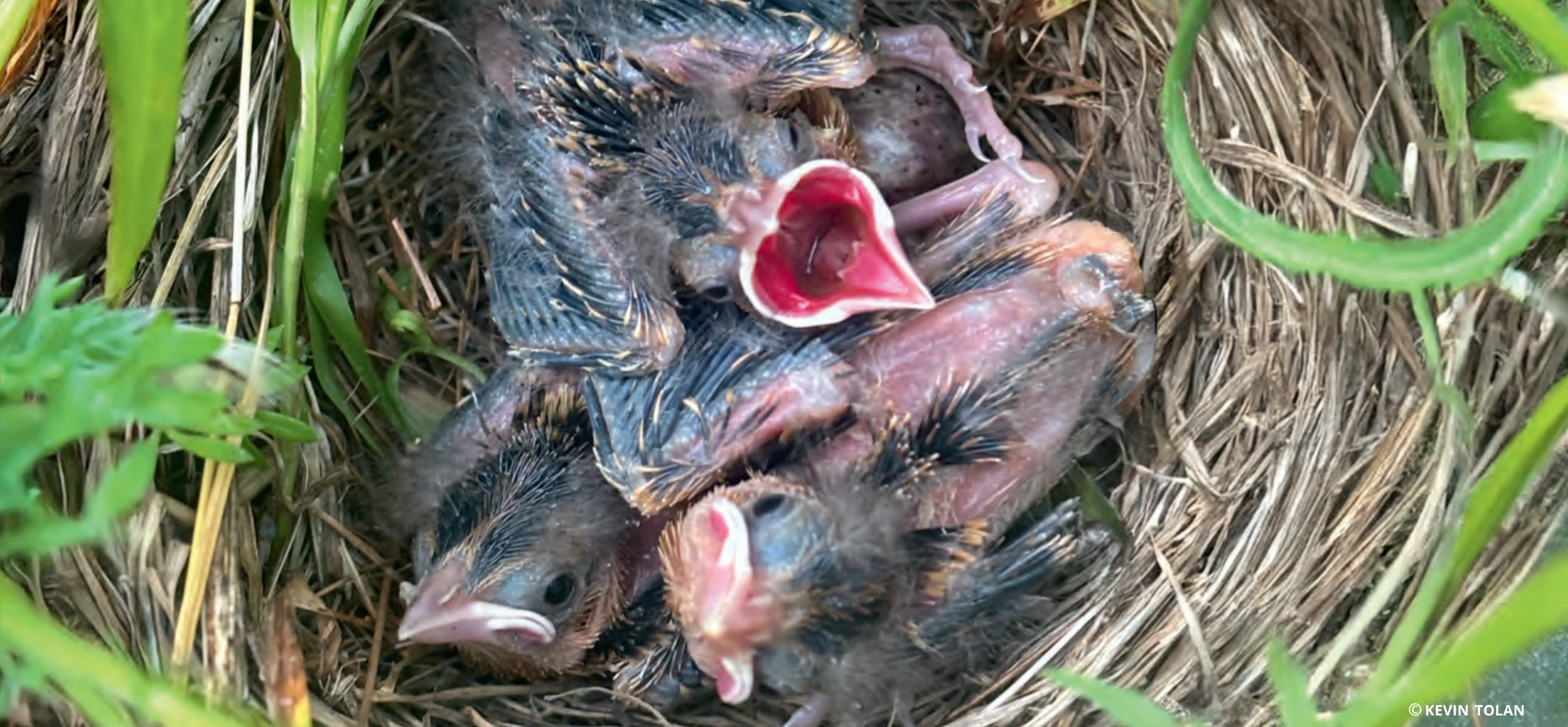
Take your binoculars on your next walk—who knows what first-of-the-year bird you may see? Each day holds promise of a new discovery, a crocus bud pushing through the last of the snow, the year's first Mourning Cloak gathering minerals from a puddle on the driveway, and a Bloodroot, Red Trillium, or trout lily blossom that draws your eye to the forest floor.

Gardeners are, perhaps, in an optimism class of their own. How many varieties of tomato seeds should I start? I always end up with hundreds, though my backyard garden plot can accommodate maybe 10 nightshades, with all the other veggies I intend to cultivate. And around the edges: native flowers to support specialist bees, butterfly host plants, companion plants to control garden pests. My garden will be a wonderland of pollinators, and my aspirations are high for recording every one of them in iNaturalist. Maybe I'll be the one to find Vermont's 353rd bee species. Anything's possible—it's spring, after all.

If you're ready to plan your own garden, to look ahead to field excursions during warmer weather, to get your hands dirty and tend your own patch of earth, then this issue of Field Notes is a handbook of sorts. VCE's science can guide your choice of native plants, teach you how to encourage and steward wild pollinators, and provide the latest on how to make your hayfield and meadow bird friendly.

I hope you'll find inspiration and empowerment in these pages. Whatever projects you take on (and we hope one of VCE's several community science projects will be among them), I encourage you to share your discoveries with us and let us know how you've employed our science-based recommendations in your own activities. Happy spring!

By Susan Hindinger
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Bobolink nestlings found by Kevin Tolan last summer in a hayfield in Charlotte, Vermont, that is managed for grassland birds

Saving the Song of the Bobolink

How to address the threat of invasive plants in your hayfield | BY KEVIN TOLAN

"There's a bright, golden haze on the meadow...all the sounds of the earth are like music."

When I'm out doing grassland bird surveys, I think of the opening song to Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, which captures to perfection the magical mood of sunrise over rolling hayfields. As the predawn coolness is replaced by a warm morning sunshine, the robotic song of a Bobolink rings out while it flutters above the field, and an Eastern Meadowlark echoes from the distance. It seems idyllic, but look closely at the vegetation. Menacing threats are creeping in from the edges—Spotted Knapweed, Smooth Bedstraw, Yellow Rattle, and Poison Parsnip are invading and taking over the diverse grassland and, with it, bird habitat.

The primary threat to grassland birds is habitat loss, according to a 2014 paper by VCE Conservation Biologist Jason Hill and A Full Life Cycle Conservation Plan for Bobolink by VCE co-founder Roz Renfrew. This has certainly been the case in Vermont. Reforestation of hayfields, parcelization, and increased agricultural intensity have greatly reduced the available breeding habitat for these ground-nesting birds. The steep declines of species such as Upland Sandpiper and, more recently, Eastern Meadowlark have been particularly noticeable.

Now even grassland habitat that's protected from fragmentation is imperiled by invasive plants.

Grassland birds aren't picky about the species of plants that form their nesting fields, but rather the shape and growth structure of those plants, only choosing to breed in grass-dominated fields. Although most of the common grasses planted in hayfields were introduced to North America by settlers, these non-native grasses form a similar vegetative structure to native grass species and provide suitable habitat for grassland birds. Grasslands that appear to provide the highest-quality nesting habitat for Bobolink tend to have a mixture of grasses and sedges of various heights that act as nest cover.

The most commonly employed management strategy to facilitate grassland bird breeding is delayed management—not mowing during the nesting season, which runs from late May until about July 15—to give birds time to successfully fledge their young. However, this extended period of uninterrupted growth allows invasive plants to seed and flourish. They rapidly form dense monocultures that outcompete the grasses relied on by grassland birds for nesting.

Managing a hayfield to reduce the presence of invasive plants through frequent cutting and reseeding may help provide long-term habitat but can have negative short-term consequences for grassland birds. Cutting the field several times per summer can reduce the vigor of undesirable species, but breeding adults won't have enough time to successfully fledge young. Tilling and reseeding are even more effective to eradicate invasive plants, but these practices reduce the habitat quality for the several years it takes for the vegetation to regrow to suitable breeding

The primary threat to grassland birds is habitat loss.

habitat. Hayfield reinvigoration is further complicated by its financial cost, particularly for a field that's unlikely to produce a monetary return on this investment.

To maximize the nesting quality of fields, land managers should aim to prevent the spread of invasive plants into the interior of fields where grassland birds prefer to nest. The most effective and cost-efficient way to control invasive plants is to stay vigilant for their arrival and act quickly upon finding them to prevent their spread. This targeted management can be done mechanically, chemically, or via animals, all of which have pros and cons that I won't get into here. Additionally, maintaining a "moat"—a frequently mowed two-meter-wide path along the forest edge—can reduce the incursion of invasive and woody vegetation.

Hayfields are frequently overlooked in the forested Northeast, but with much of Vermont's landscape predicted to have a high long-term potential for Bobolink conservation, our hayfields may play an increasingly important role in sustaining the global population of Bobolinks and other grassland birds. While research into this rapidly emerging issue is still in its early stages, VCE is taking steps to address it in partnership with landowners throughout the state.

Incorporating invasive plant management into hayfields that provide habitat for grassland birds could make a major difference to your local Bobolinks and Eastern Meadowlarks in the uncertain decades to come. FN

A Master Gardener and His Habitat Garden

What started as a Monarch meadow has become so much more. | BY ALDEN WICKER

Shelburne Farms is famous for its Frederick Law Olmsted gardens and its sustainably managed, 1,400-acre working farm. But there's a special place not open to the public that you might be able to visit if you have a passion for (or just curiosity about) invertebrates.

"I love talking about the garden. And anybody who wants to come, I'll talk to forever," says Terry Cecchini, age 79. On a hot July day last year, he met me down the road from the Shelburne Farms welcome center, at the south gate, punching in the code so I could follow him in my car down a long dirt road past rolling, green fields.

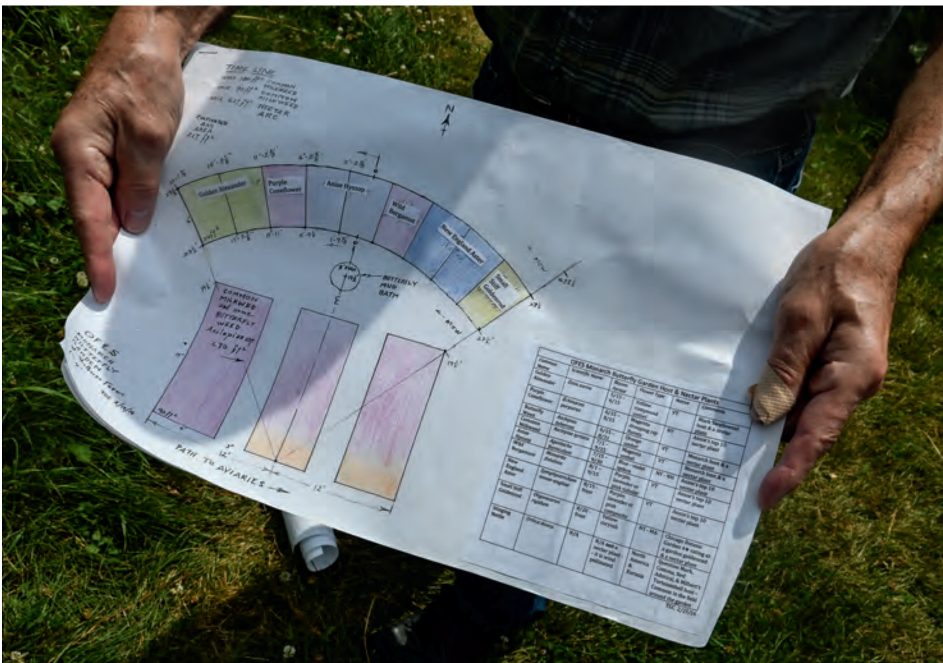
We passed the enormous Breeding Barn—until 1939 the largest open-span wooden structure in America—and parked at a small former dog kennel that serves as headquarters for Outreach for Earth Stewardship (OES), Cecchini's nonprofit wildlife organization that he started in 1987 with his wife. He and his other co-founder Craig Newman shelter and rehabilitate raptors in an aviary down the hill. (Near the end of my visit, Newman passed by on his way to an educational demonstration with a small, fluffy, Eastern Screech Owl on his gloved arm.) To reach the aviary, you first pass through a wooden gate decorated with owls into Cecchini and Newman's garden, a sanctuary for all manner of Vermont winged things.

In 2011, Cecchini retired from his long career as a senior electrical engineer with Green Mountain Power and decided to become a master gardener. He was interested in cultivating milkweed to support Monarchs and noticed an unused field across from OES's building, so he asked permission to create a little garden.

"And of course, Monarchs are your entry-level insect," he says. Cecchini turned to the first Vermont Butterfly Atlas, an effort led by VCE co-founder Kent McFarland to catalogue every species of butterfly present in Vermont between 2002 and 2007. Cecchini made a list of almost 40 butterflies that could be expected to visit this type of fieldlike habitat, as well as their host plants, which served as one aspect of his plant wish list.

He added in host plants for native bees and brought in three yards of sand to create a place for ground-nesting bees to easily burrow into. He found out that moths provide crucial nutrition to birds, bats, spiders, frogs, and toads. Something like 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars are required to raise one brood of chickadees. "No way are those all butterfly

6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars are required to raise one brood of chickadees.



Cecchini's original garden plan—things have changed since then. "It turned out that some things were more aggressive than others, like the yarrow, and some things had to be moved," he says.

Terry Cecchini in his garden

"It went from being a Monarch way station to [one for] pollinators in general," Cecchini tells me. "And now it's really more of an ecogarden."

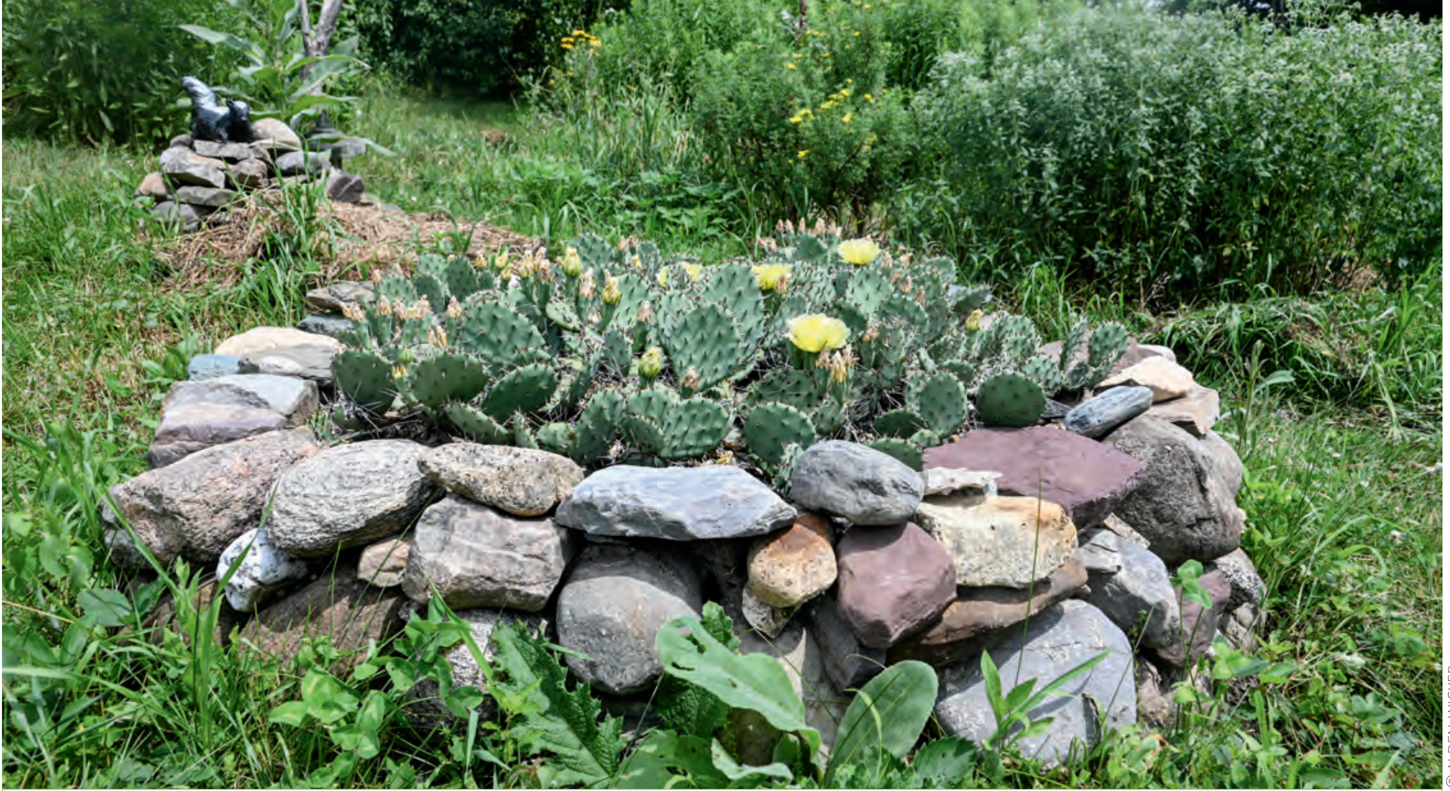
larvae," he says. He pointed to the red oak that towers nearby, which, according to research by VCE Conservation Biologist Desirée Narango, can host more than 400 species of Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) in Vermont alone, and over 900 nationwide. A red oak sapling was planted in a garden bed by a squirrel; now it's in a more appropriate place and bounded with stakes so it doesn't get accidentally mowed.

Newman and Cecchini will pounce on free plants offered up on Front Porch Forum (Vermont's community Listserv) or find them elsewhere on the farm and transplant them. Cecchini estimates he's planted at least 60 different plant species, including Northern Blue Flag Iris (*Iris versicolor*), pokeweed (genus *Phytolacca*), black walnut (genus *Juglans*), Red Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), joe-pye weed (genus *Eutrochium*), and mountain mint (genus *Pycnanthemum*). They've thrived in the rich soil; the organic matter is close to 7% and the pH is seven, likely due to the fact that cattle were kept here in the 1960s. Right now he's working on creating a hedgerow out of American Black Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), Alternate-leafed Dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*), and Common Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*), among others.

"It went from being a Monarch way station to [one for] pollinators in general," Cecchini tells me. "And now it's really more of an ecogarden. There are hoverflies, multiple kinds of beetles, wasps—not just our yellowjacket friends, but a whole lot of solitary wasps." The garden now sprawls over about a third of an acre.

Cecchinini is a walking encyclopedia, combining his master gardener's knowledge of each plant's height, spread, and cultivation needs (such as soil and moisture, aggressiveness, and bloom and fruiting time) with research on Vermont wildlife preferences to ensure that as many native winged creatures as possible can find what they need here in every season.

Cecchini provides the plants; his colleague Newman documents their visitors, with more than 1,200 observations added to iNaturalist. He's documented everything from Yellow-Banded Bumblebee (*Bombus terricola*), which is a State Threatened species after nearly disappearing in the 2000s, to Seven-spotted Lady Beetle (*Coccinella septempunctata*), Bedstraw Hawkmoth (*Hyles gallii*), Blueberry Stem Gall Wasp (*Hemadas nubilipennis*), Northern Leopard Frog (*Lithobates pipiens*), and, yes, Monarch Butterflies. Turns out the beloved butterflies are one-tenth of the interesting things that live, eat, and breed in this habitat garden.


© ALDEN WICKER

As he gardened, Cecchini pulled rocks out of the soil (as Vermonters do), and using skills acquired from a daylong rock wall–building course built a raised bed for the Eastern Pricklypear (*Opuntia cespitosa*), which thrives in the well-drained glacial till of the site.

The Word document with Cecchini's notes on the garden now runs to 50 pages. He comes to the garden to work for an hour or two a day when it's above 50 degrees and not raining, keeping an eye out for invasives like buckthorn and honeysuckle, weeding the grass that is forever trying to encroach from the fields, and keeping the more aggressive plants in check by cutting them back.

Cecchini estimates this garden is at least 80% native. Nonnatives include a lilac bush that he took from his mother-in-law's backyard when the house was sold. "You can plant the things you love too," he says, citing research done by Narango showing that a garden that effectively supports insectivorous birds can have as little as 70% of its biomass composed of native plants.

"And then there's the whole issue of cultivars," he says. "Cultivars are selections from either the wild or from a breeding program that are generally pleasing to humans. Unfortunately, what's pleasing to humans can eliminate the pollen- or nectar-producing parts of the plant, so they become sterile." (Narango, who has studied cultivars, says it's not common, but can happen.)

Where that doesn't apply is the Bethel apple tree he received from the Maine Heritage Orchard. Apple trees are cultivars, but bred to produce fruit so they have plenty to offer pollinators. He also has a Northern Spy apple tree that flowers around the same time, three American Plum trees, and native raspberry bushes, which are beloved by bees, hoverflies, and chipmunks. (He lets the birds and other animals have all the edible berries.) A Prickly Ash is not a normal garden plant—it's thorny and leggy—but it is the citrus most suited for northern climates and plays host to the Eastern Giant Swallowtail, a southerly species that only showed up in Vermont for the first time in 2010.

Between the high number of native plants, the lack of cultivars, the lack of mulched beds, and the light touch he has on the plants—for example, leaving spent flowers on their stalks so bees have a place to nest and letting leaves fall where they may—the garden has a wild, untamed look.

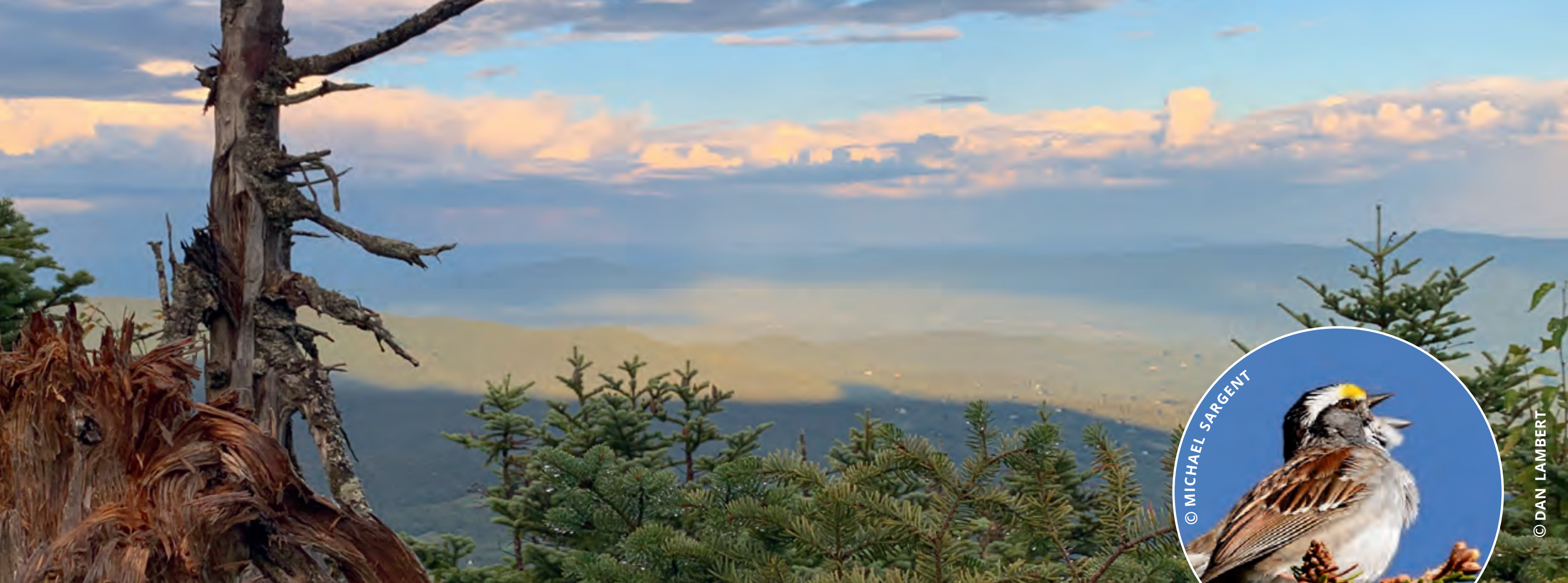
"It's not your grandmother's garden," he says. "That look to me is not pretty anymore." It looks, he says, like a habitat in the middle of succession, maybe a meadow that sprung up after a forest fire on its way to becoming a forest.

Ironically, that milkweed he tried to cultivate from seed at the beginning? It never really took where he put it. It's a notoriously stubborn and independent-minded plant.

So wherever it pops up, he leaves it, even if it's in the middle of a path. If you want to support the wildlife, you gotta let things be a little wild.

If you would like to follow Cecchini's lead, you can use not only the Vermont Butterfly Atlas but also the new, 2025 Annotated Checklist of the Bees (Hymenoptera: Apoidea) of Vermont to find potential host plants for pollinators across New England. Both are available at val.vtecostudies.org. FN

Looking for more ways to get involved? You can also document visitors to your garden by joining the iNaturalist Project, Pollinator Interactions on Plants (PIP).


© MICHAEL SARGENT
© DAN LAMBERT

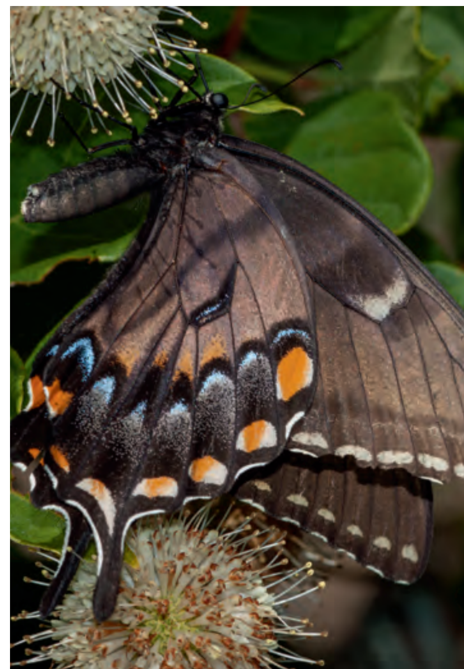
Above: View from Mount Mansfield • Right: White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*)

A Good Excuse to Get Outside

Looking for a reason to look closer at nature this summer? VCE has plenty of ways to get involved in community science, plus explore and protect your local area. | BY DANA WILLIAMS

If your idea of fun includes back-country camping and a spectacular sunrise view, then Mountain Birdwatch may be the project for you. Mountain Birdwatch volunteers rise before dawn to count singing birds at six stops along a mountain trail. You don't have to be a master birder to join this project—take the spring to learn the songs of 10 species, then go on your adventure anytime in June. This project has open routes in Maine and New Hampshire. The hiking routes vary from easy to extreme. This project is our region's only way to monitor high-elevation nesting bird species, which are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Visit mountainbirdwatch.org to learn more and see which routes are open for adoption in 2026.

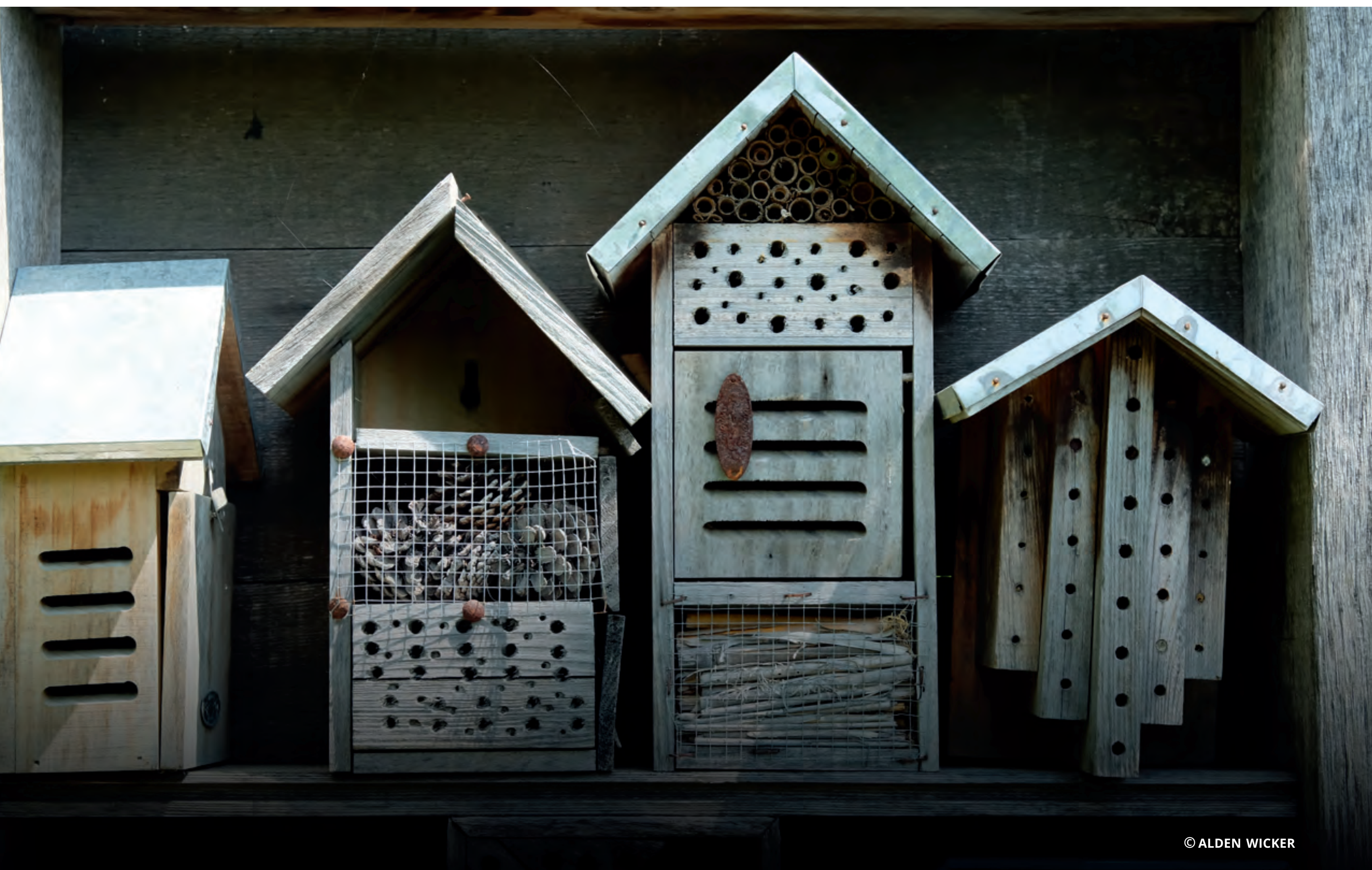
If you're looking for a way to contribute closer to home, check out the Second Vermont Butterfly Atlas. Snap a photo of the swallowtail butterfly in your garden or count butterflies during a trip to your favorite meadow trail. Upload your photos to e-butterfly.org or iNaturalist.org to contribute from anywhere in Vermont. Want to find more butterflies? Help us at one of our 184 priority sites across Vermont. Check out our VBA2 Block Mapper at val.vtecostudies.org to find one of these red or green blocks where your contribution can have the most impact. Adopt a block to earn fun achievement badges online, displayed on the Butterfly Badge Challenge page. Want to hang out with other butterfly people? Join us in the field for our Butterfly Blitzes—a series of fun, collaborative challenges across the state where you'll join a group led by a VCE expert and help us collect real data in undersurveyed areas. Any and all levels of butterfly ID skills are welcome! Visit the Vermont Butterfly Atlas events page to see the Blitz schedule and sign up. With your help, we will know exactly where in Vermont we need to prioritize butterfly protection. FN


© KENT MCFARLAND

Eastern Tiger Swallowtail *(Papilio glaucus)* dark form female nectaring on Buttonbush *(Cephalanthus occidentalis)*

Want to see other volunteer opportunities? Contact Dana at dwilliams@vtecostudies.org to see what VCE has to offer.

Scan to access Butterfly Atlas block mapper


© ALDEN WICKER

Hymenoptera Hotels

Is this a trend we should be promoting at all? | BY SPENCER HARDY

You might know them as bee hotels. I'm talking about cavities for nesting insects, often made from bamboo or other hollow tubes.

Early in the spring, mason bees (subfamily *Osmia*) are the target demographic for these trendy, high-density housing complexes, but as the summer progresses, other Hymenoptera groups are likely to move in.

Mason and potter wasps (subfamily *Eumeninae*) are some of the most common nest occupants, and should be celebrated by gardeners—most of the more than 25 species in Vermont are caterpillar killers that also visit a wide range of flowers for nectar to sustain their hunting efforts. Another common hotel visitor is the Mexican Grass–carrying Wasp (*Isodontia mexicana*), which fills its nests with paralyzed tree crickets (genus *Oecanthus*).

(As always, we encourage folks to document the biodiversity in their backyard through iNaturalist. Observations of wasps are particularly valuable because there has not been a concentrated effort to document their diversity in the state like we've done for bees.)

Still, is this a trend we should be promoting at all? Hymenoptera hotels come in a lot of different forms and serve a range of purposes, but they can also cause real problems for the intended beneficiaries. Most of the problems originate from unwanted guests: parasites, predators, and introduced competitors. Pollen-collecting bees and cavity-nesting wasps spend a great deal of energy aggregating dispersed resources from the surrounding landscape, and this rarely goes unnoticed by freeloaders. Dozens of wasps, flies, beetles, and moths have evolved to live off the stores of hard-working Hymenoptera. A quarter of the bee species in Vermont don't even collect their own pollen!

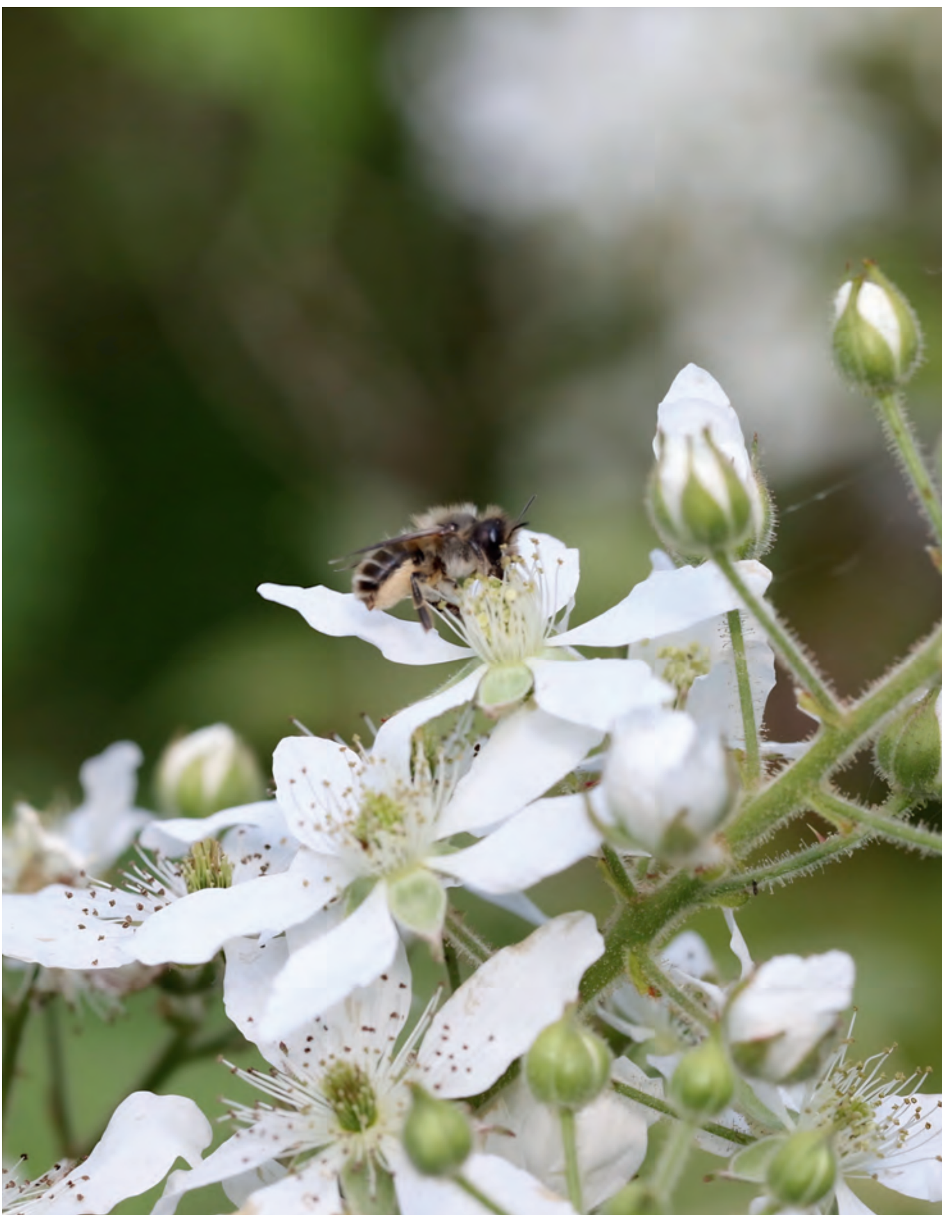
Many of these pirates are critical, native components of our ecosystems and deserve admiration and conservation. But there are several introduced

Building nesting sites is one way to bring more insects into your life, but your best bet is always adding more native plants to the landscape.

parasites, including the Houdini Fly (*Cacoxenus indagator*), that can quickly overrun a large bee hotel. Also of concern are a small number of nonnative bees—especially the Horn-faced Mason (*Osmia cornifrons*), recently established in much of the country—that are potentially displacing some of our native mason bees. Hotels can also become fast-food joints for woodpeckers and chickadees.

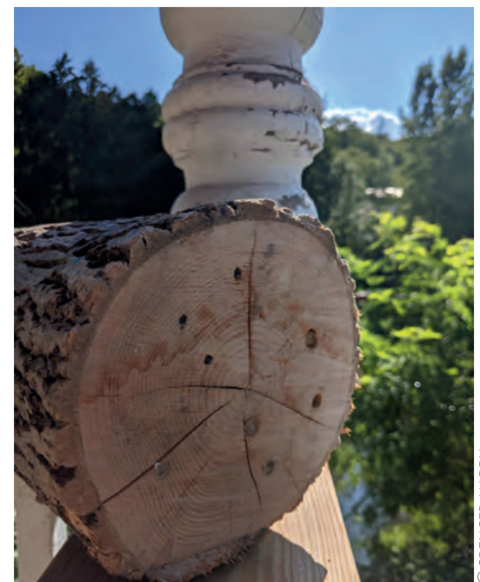
So if you want to get into the hotel business, plan for some vigilance and ongoing management. Ideally each nest gets an annual winter cleaning, in which individual bee cocoons are sorted out and stored for release in the spring. Short of that, many problems can be avoided by building only small hotels and using natural materials that will break down after a few seasons, preventing the long-term buildup of pests and diseases.

Even with the concerns laid out above, I think there is still a place for Hymenoptera hotels, and I've built a few in our own yard. In highly developed landscapes where natural nesting sites for these insects are limited, these



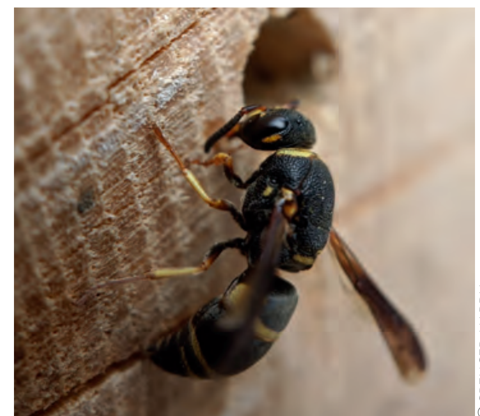
© SPENCER HARDY

Horn-faced Mason Bee (*Osmia cornifrons*)



© SPENCER HARDY

A simple hotel made from holes of multiple sizes, drilled in the end of a cut log



© SPENCER HARDY

The first Vermont record of the Hidalgo Mason Wasp (*Euodynerus hidalgo*), from a bee hotel on a second-story porch in downtown Montpelier

MIKE DAVIDSON (VIA INATURALIST, PUBLIC DOMAIN)

Horn-faced Mason Bee (*Osmia cornifrons*)

Dozens of insects live off the stores of hard-working bees and wasps.

hotels might be truly beneficial, but perhaps their greatest value is in the educational impact. Without them, observing nesting bees can be quite challenging and unpredictable. Even a simple piece of firewood with drilled holes can provide a full season of entertainment and discovery, with daily opportunities to watch the housekeepers at work. Unlike honey bees and social wasps, most bee-hotel occupants are unlikely to sting unless roughly handled. I'm looking forward to introducing our toddler to our winged neighbors this spring! Building nesting sites is one way to bring more insects into your life, but your best bet is always adding more native plants to the landscape. Many native plants do double duty, providing both food and nesting sites in their hollow stems—the elderberries, sumacs, and brambles are some of the best for cavity-nesting Hymenoptera. Leaving the dead stalks and seed heads of perennials saves on garden cleanup and can provide nesting sites for a variety of bees (and food for birds) through the winter. FN

For more information and links to best practices, plus design ideas for your Hymenoptera hotel, please scan QR code below!

Scan Here

You Don't Have to Travel to Make a Discovery

That quick pic on your phone could be a first for the species. | KENT MCFARLAND

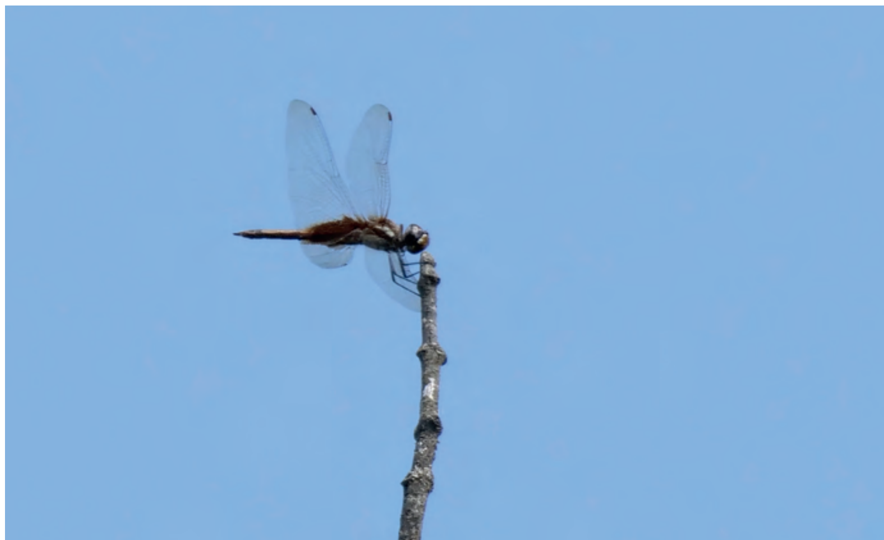
On a sunny August afternoon, amateur naturalist Ben Whittington swung by a marsh on his way to run errands. Noticing a dragonfly perched atop a tree, he snapped a few photos from a distance before it flew away. He uploaded them to iNaturalist Vermont and let the computer vision do its work: Striped Saddlebags (*Tramea darwini*).

This insect is normally found much farther south, but it wasn't until the next day that the significance sank in; he couldn't refute the ID using his field guide. He tagged two Vermont experts. What followed was a rapid-fire collaboration between Bryan Pfeiffer, Mike Blust, and, eventually, world authority Dennis Paulson, all poring over the images and arriving at the same conclusion: Vermont had a new dragonfly.

Turns out, we don't have to travel to some remote, exotic, tropical forest to find something new. Discoveries are among us right here in Vermont.

We aren't looking hard enough or at all for many groups, like spiders and other invertebrates. We don't even know all the species that exist, let alone where they are or what they do. The more rare or threatened a species is, the harder we have to work to keep track of it. Species can vanish from our awareness long before they truly disappear. They're not necessarily extinct—it's just that no one is looking.

With the help of thousands of community scientists, we've discovered hundreds of new species for Vermont and rediscovered many that were lost.



© BEN WHITTINGTON (VIA INATURALIST, LICENSED UNDER CC-BY-NC)

Ben Whittington captured this photo of a Striped Saddlebags (*Tramea darwini*) while running errands, uploaded it to iNaturalist, and found a new dragonfly for Vermont.

Discovery comes in many forms. Maybe it's a species completely new to science, never formally described or named. It might be a species known to science but newly found in Vermont. Or perhaps it's a lost species, one that hasn't been recorded for a decade or even a century.

This was one of the reasons we created the Vermont Atlas of Life: to allow everyone to join in discovery in their own communities, using crowd-sourced platforms like eBird Vermont, iNaturalist Vermont, and e-Butterfly alongside more scientifically rigorous atlasing and sampling methods.

Over the last 15 years, expert and novice observers alike have delivered.

With the help of thousands of community scientists, we've discovered hundreds of new species for Vermont and rediscovered many that were lost. Since the last official checklist of Vermont moth species was published in 1995, more than 370 species have been added, 26 in just the last two years, many of them found by backyard moth watchers posting photographs to iNaturalist. The Vermont Bee Survey recorded 70 new species and found 20 lost ones. In the last five years, observers have added nine new species of grasshoppers, crickets, and katydids.

The celebration of discovery goes on, and we hope you'll join in. Read more about the most exciting discoveries at val.vtecostudies.org/latest-discoveries. FN

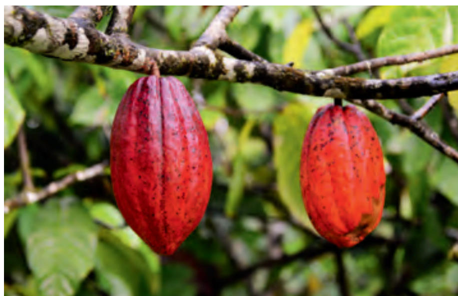
Field Notes

Vermont Center for Ecostudies
PO BOX 420
Norwich, VT 05055

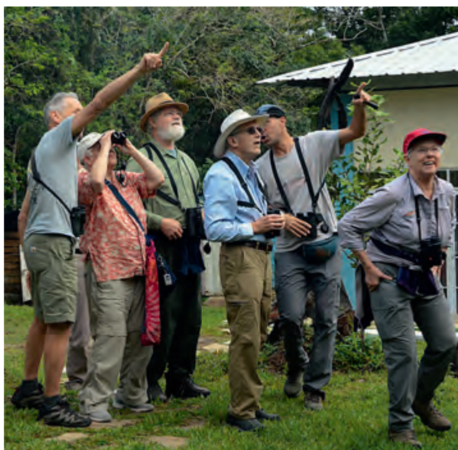
Non Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
Wht Riv Jct, VT
Permit No. 73

VCE Heads to the D.R.

This February, VCE Caribbean Conservation Coordinator Jim Goetz and Executive Director Susan Hindinger drew Director Emeritus Chris Rimmer out of retirement for VCE's first-ever guided trip to the Dominican Republic. Eight adventurous friends joined the trip, co-led by Goetz and Iván Mota of Cúa Birding Tours.



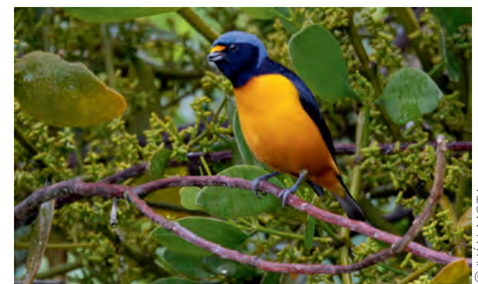
© SERGIO DELAROSA



© SERGIO DELAROSA

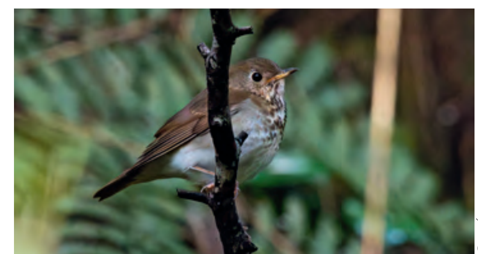
The group ventured to the high-elevation cloud forests of the Sierra de Bahoruco at daybreak, spotting the La Selle's, Red-legged, and (of course) Bicknell's Thrushes; Rufous-throated Solitaires; and Hispaniolan Trogons (among many other natural wonders). Touring the briny waters of Laguna Oviedo by boat added flamingoes, gulls, pelicans, and egrets to their list (along with Rhinoceros Iguanas). Another site offered rare, extended views of foraging Ruddy- and White-fronted Quail-doves, and an evening outing produced a gasp-inducing encounter with an Ashy-faced Owl. In all, they observed 31 of the DR's 34 endemic birds.

The group also visited conservation and research sites VCE has studied and helped to protect over the last 35 years, including Reserva Privada de Zorzal, the DR's first private forest reserve and organic cacao farm, which VCE helped to establish in 2012. Then they visited the headquarters of VCE's local partners, Grupo Jaragua. Located in the southwest town of Oviedo, Grupo Jaragua engages in a broad portfolio of marine and terrestrial conservation and education programs to benefit both people and wildlife. These include forest restoration projects and a native plant nursery to help create a sustainable market for endangered plants.



© IVÁN MOTA

Hispaniolan Euphonia *(Chlorophonia musica)*



© IVÁN MOTA

Bicknell's Thrush *(Catharus bicknelli)*

One participant who was inspired to contribute to VCE and Grupo Jaragua's conservation efforts after seeing the results in person said, "What is being done for these birds is also creating livelihoods and education for agri-forest farmers, for entrepreneurs, and for the ecosystem at large". FN