



# VES NEWS

The Newsletter of the Vermont Entomological Society

Number 106  
Winter 2020



## VES Officers

|                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
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| Warren Kiel      | <i>Vice President</i>    |
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The **Vermont Entomological Society** (VES) is devoted to the study, conservation, and appreciation of invertebrates. Founded in 1993, VES sponsors selected research, workshops and field trips for the public, including children. Our quarterly newsletter features developments in entomology, accounts of insect events and field trips, as well as general contributions from members or other entomologists.

VES is open to anyone interested in arthropods. Our members range from casual insect watchers to amateur and professional entomologists. We welcome members of all ages, abilities and interests.

You can join VES by sending dues of \$15 per year to:

Deb Kiel  
147 Allen Irish Road  
Underhill, VT 05489

### Cover Photo:

Locust Borer Beetle (*Megacyllene robiniae*),  
Family Cerambycidae  
Photo Credit: Bill Boccio

### Back Cover Photo:

Beetle Mandala: Spotted Tiger Beetle Mandala, Family  
Carabidae Photo: Bill Boccio

For more information on the  
Vermont Entomological Society, visit  
[www.VermontInsects.org](http://www.VermontInsects.org)

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## Newsletter Schedule

Spring: Deadline April 7 - Publication May 1  
Summer: Deadline July 7 - Publication August 1  
Fall: Deadline October 7 - Publication November 1  
Winter: Deadline January 7 - Publication February 1

## Membership Check Your Mailing Label

The upper right corner of your mailing label will inform you of the month and year your VES membership expires.

Dues are \$15 and can be sent to our Treasurer:

Vermont Entomological Society  
c/o Deb Kiel  
147 Allen Irish Road  
Underhill, VT 05489





We start a new decade with some sense of the passing of the old; literally as Dr. Ross Bell passed away in November. Ross was a founding member of the Vermont Entomological Society (VES) and a catalyst for the organization.

One of the core goals at the inception of VES was to “promote the stability and support for the Zoology Department Zaddock Thompson collections (Torrey Hall) as a viable biodiversity resource.” At the time the collection, though one of the most complete natural history museums in state, was considered in poor condition. The museum, virtually unknown to the majority of the UVM community, was subsisting off a budget of \$200 per year.

It was thought that the museum could : serve as a repository for voucher specimens for any insect research in VT; make record of VT arthropod distribution; be a teaching and research source for undergraduate and graduate programs as well as elementary and secondary schools in the state; an extension reference; a base for natural history surveys; a source and repository for taxonomic literature; a synoptic

collection of invertebrates to facilitate identifications, etc..

It's hard to say what impact VES's early forays had on UVM politics, but I consider it kismet that Ross would pass away the same day there was an open house at the current Zaddock Thompson Invertebrate Collection. I would hope that he was able to find some solace in knowing that his dream of a better UVM collection was still alive. Over fifty visitors and volunteers participated in the open house.

Most people think of Ross's legacy as his proficiency with carabid and Rhysodid beetles, but I wonder if it was the people that Ross was able to surround himself with. Ross was the epicenter of an amazing generation of entomologists and insect collectors.

A colleague referred to Ross as “his own brand of very interesting person” and those of us fortunate to have known him were damned lucky. I was one of the lucky ones and surprisingly so as I'm not even a Coleopterist but Ross was always friendly and giving of his time. He was also well known for his wry wit.

Here are some Ross quotes from a Burlington Free Press article by Melissa Hart (8.3.2000) entitled “Insect Group Promotes Pests”:

“I don't know why people are squeamish; maybe they weren't raised right”

“Maybe those alarmed people should protest “bug zappers” instead. The way they advertise those things is really a fraud “

“There are advantages to studying the pesky ones: like horseflies and deerflies. Once you know where they are, you know how to avoid them”

“People who used to be grossed out by bugs find out that some of them, like moths, butterflies, and dragonflies, are nice to look at”

When Warren Kiel told Ross that after a lifetime of working on Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) he was finally getting interested in beetles, he said Ross just looked at him and said calmly “Well that's a step in the right direction.”

Michael Sabourin



## In Memoriam: Dr. Ross Taylor Bell:

By Robert Davidson, Bard D. Rockenbach and Michael Sabourin

Shelburne - Ross Taylor Bell of Shelburne, VT, died November 9, 2019 at the age of 90. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Joyce Rockenbach Bell.

Ross was born April 23, 1929, in Champaign, Illinois, to Alfred Hannam Bell and Dorothy Becker Bell. He had two sisters, Martha and Enid, who both predeceased him. The family were keen naturalists, and family vacations included long drives to various locations in the USA where the family would pursue their particular interests in botany, zoology, and geology.

Ross was a renowned entomologist who first became interested in insects when his parents gave him an insect collecting kit. At age 14, he started working for the Natural History Survey at the University of Illinois, where he sorted and identified different types of flies. He spent his summers at his aunt and uncle's farm in Ohio where, in between farm chores, he would collect and attempt to name insects from the fields and nearby stream.

Ross attended the University of Illinois from 1946 to 1949, and was awarded a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology. He was then awarded a Master of Science degree with a thesis about the Carabidae (ground beetles) of Illinois. In the early 1950s he completed his doctoral dissertation and was awarded a Ph.D. Ross was selected for a Fulbright Fellowship to go to India. Before he could go, however, he was called for national service and spent two years at Fort Dietrich, Maryland, then known as America's 'Germ

Warfare Center'. There, he worked with fleas and discovered a rapid way to differentiate males from females. On discharge from the army, he joined the University of Vermont (UVM) faculty lecturing on evolution, field zoology, invertebrate zoology, entomology and mountain ecology. His field entomology course was a favorite among undergraduate students.

A research trip to Mexico in the summer of 1956 gave his career focus when he discovered his first undescribed rhyssodine beetle. This led to a lifelong fascination which established him as the world expert on these particular beetles. Throughout the rest of his career, Ross would make a worldwide search for rhyssodine beetles and eventually discover and name 265 of the 350 different species of rhyssodine beetles now known.

But Ross didn't work alone. In his early days at UVM, Ross met a nursing teacher, Joyce Elaine Rockenbach of Whitestone, Queens, New York City. They were married in Littleton, New Hampshire in 1957. The two became inseparable companions in the pursuit of entomology. During the 1960s, they began an active program to document the arthropod fauna of Vermont. Their work became the foundation of the UVM Entomological Collection and expanded it into a significant resource for northern New England and world carabid beetles. In the 1970s and 1980s, Ross and Joyce extended their entomological work beyond Vermont, stretching as far as Australia (Tasmania) and Papua New Guinea. They have published many research papers as co-authors since 1965. Ross recently published the [Carabidae of Vermont and New Hampshire, 2015, Shires Press.](#) Despite chronic health issues over the last two years, a large final manuscript was completed: A Catalogue of the World Rhyssodini (Coleoptera: Carabidae), with Sections on Phylogenetics and

Zoogeography. It will be published posthumously in the Annals of Carnegie Museum (where around a dozen Bell and Bell papers have been published) at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, where their world-class collection of Rhyssodini and exotic Carabidae has been deposited, and where Ross was a Research Associate for nearly forty years.



Ross and Joyce (2012) with friends' Wake Robin collection  
Photo: Andrew Nemethy, VT Digger ([Vermontdigger.org](http://Vermontdigger.org))  
<https://vtdigger.org/2012/03/11/in-this-state-famous-in-the-world-of-beetles-ross-bell-is-vermonts-bug-virtuoso/>

## In Memoriam: Dr. Ross Taylor Bell: (continued)

Ross retired from UVM in 2000. He was a Life Member of the Coleopterists Society and an emeritus member of the Vermont Entomological Society. As a testament to Ross' respectful teaching method and affable personality, he maintained friendships with his graduate students, many of whom have gone on to have careers in entomology. In 2010 BellFest (<https://zookeys.pensoft.net/issue/360/>) was held to honor Ross's 80th birthday and the distinguished careers of both Ross and Joyce.

Farewell to Ross T. Bell, an extraordinary, legendary individual. Ross will be sorely missed by the scientific community and, of course, his wife.

In lieu of flowers, Joyce asks for donations to the Vermont Entomological Society in Ross' name; c/o Debra Kiel, 147 Allen Irish Rd., Underhill, VT 05489. (Obituary published in The Burlington Free Press from Nov. 19 to Nov. 24, 2019.)



Ross and Joyce enjoying Jessica Rykken's 3-D carabid quiz  
Photo: Jessica Rykken (BellFest, June 12-15, 2010)

### A Giant Among Men

By Donald H. Miller

I first learned of Ross Bell's existence back in the 1960s when I saw an article in The Burlington Free Press about a professor who did research on carabid beetles, taught invertebrate zoology and was keeping organismic biology alive and well at the University of Vermont.

I had been collecting insects at Lyndon State College at the time and was becoming a self-taught taxonomist, primarily because I wanted to tell my students the names of the species we studied in field classes. I was the only zoologist at the college but was a vertebrate ecologist, not an entomologist, by training. I had at one time studied Siphonaptera (Fleas) for my master's degree—my first attempt ever to study any order of insects in detail.

Ross was interested in my efforts and encouraged me all the time. I collected carabids for him but avowed I would never get seriously interested in such an incredibly speciose group, about which I knew little to nothing at the time, save for the tiger beetles. (Being a serious birder, the fact that tiger beetles were mostly quite colorful and flew so fast, relative to most beetles I knew, is what initially attracted me to that group. They were, like miniature birds to me.)

Sensing my incompetence but budding interest in carabidology, one day Ross sat me down next to him in his lab and tried to show me, with very limited success, some very fine microstructures used to identify his beloved carabids. Despite being mentored by one of the top carabid experts in the world, my first attempt at this was pretty much a disaster. But he persisted in helping me at every turn and never showed any derision over what he must have thought was an almost hopeless case. Under his incredibly patient mentoring, carabids became one of the great intellectual challenges and interests of my professional life. I fell under Ross's spell and tutelage and got hooked, big time. Ross completely destroyed the notion that I would never attempt to learn carabids myself. He kindly gave me many voucher specimens. Every time I read "RTB" on one of the specimens he gave me, it brings back many pleasant memories.

As my association with Ross deepened over the early years of our acquaintance, I soon realized the depth and breadth of his knowledge of many other groups of insects. When he gave a free workshop at his lab, I attended and was amazed at his knowledge of Orthoptera. I learned a lot about Long-Horned

## A Giant Among Men (continued)

Katydids that day!

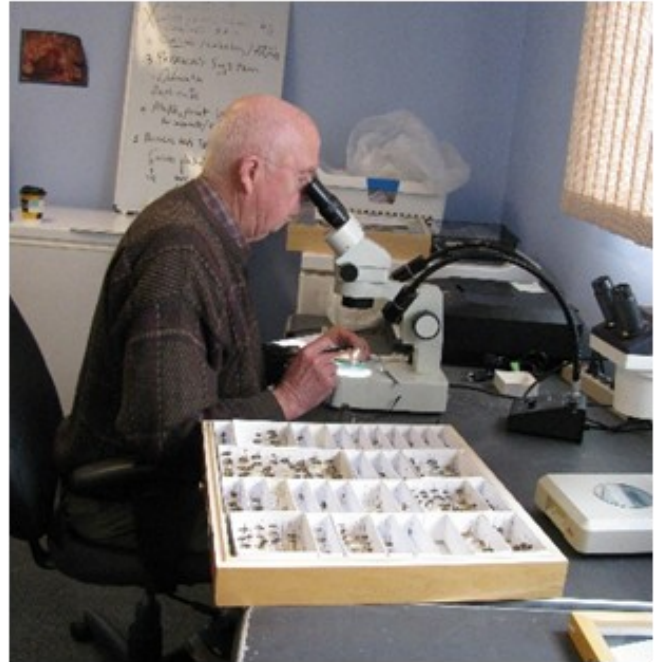
His great book, *Carabidae of Vermont and New Hampshire* (2015, Shires Press), will forever be a testimony to his overall dedication and brilliance and to his decades of field work, literally at the ground level. It includes detailed notes about every species of the 495 carabids known in Vermont and New Hampshire. In my opinion, it will never be surpassed in terms of the amount of natural history information it contains, compared to any major family taxon of terrestrial insects, at the state scale of investigation. The dot maps showing the distribution of every species at the township scale are an incredibly valuable contribution to our knowledge of the zoogeography of carabids in Vermont and New Hampshire. They will provide more grist to the mill of better understanding of the broad patterns of distribution of many insects in the Green Mountain State and elsewhere.

A measure of the great respect that so many had for Ross was the BellFest held in 2010 to honor his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and the distinguished careers of him and his wife, Joyce. I will always remember the couple sitting at a table at Airport Park in Colchester talking to Dr. George Ball, another of the great carabid experts in North America, if not the world.

Joyce deserves special mention. She has been an integral contributor to what we know about carabids, both in the way she contributed to Ross's endeavors and because of her own exemplary work with the family.

Many professional biologists, not just beetle experts, presented talks at BellFest. Many of Ross's former students also presented papers. One speaker was an authority on ferns. Ross was known and respected by many biologists in disparate fields. One of the greatest measures of any teacher is not only

his productivity and reputation but the regard of his students. Ross's students obviously loved and



Don Miller studying syrphids  
Photo: Michael Sabourin

respected him. Nothing more than that has to be said about any teacher or mentor. Many of his students went on to become leaders in entomology, and of course, many chose to work on carabids and made—and continue to make—great contributions to science.

Finally, and not least, as many of his friends know, Ross worked very hard at his craft, accomplishing many very challenging goals with great expertise. Later in his outstanding life and career, he showed us all what real courage is all about. I never once heard him complain about any obstacles that he endured. He was a giant among men in many ways, and not just as a carabidologist.

### Save the Dates:

**Herricks Cove Wildlife Festival, Rockingham, VT. Sunday, May 3, 2020.**

**Buckner Preserve, West Haven, VT. Sunday, June 28, 2020 (11 a.m. - ~3:00 p.m.)** Contacts Michael Sabourin ([mothvet@yahoo.com](mailto:mothvet@yahoo.com)) and Laurie DiCesare ([NatureHaven@MyFairPoint.net](mailto:NatureHaven@MyFairPoint.net)) or 802.893.1845.

## Completing the Naturalist's Circle

By Brian D. Farrell

I first heard about Ross Bell from fellow student naturalist friends at UVM, specifically of his Invertebrate Zoology course that he offered in fall semesters back in the 1970's. I was interested in the Wildlife Biology Department then and thought of becoming an ornithologist but was interested in all natural history-related courses, especially those with field trips and making collections of specimens and so I went to see him in his office. Ross advised me to start collecting insects over the summer. The idea was that this would be advance preparation for the fall course because the first killing frost, in those days at least, could come in September, making it much harder to assemble a diverse collection of local insects as required for the final project. In the summer of 1978, I was working as an intern (called a "hack-site attendant") on a historic nesting site called Owl's Head in NH, baby-sitting a group of five Peregrine Falcon chicks flown in by helicopter from Cornell University. This was a life-long dream, as I had admired Peregrines and falconry since I was a boy in grade school and my friend and fellow intern Ed Backus and I took turns feeding and monitoring the birds from dawn to dusk until they were independent of us. I started to collect beetles and butterflies and other insects that July and August in the White Mountains.

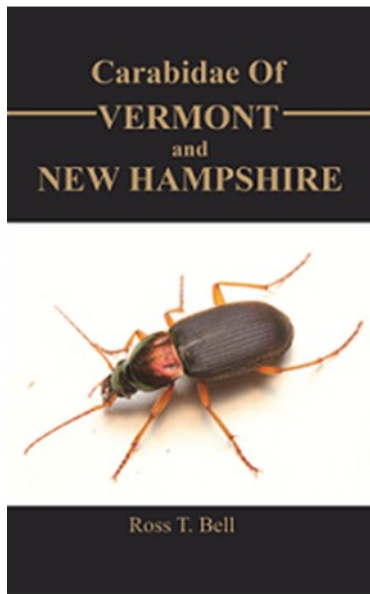
Ross shared his space with his wife, Joyce Bell, who sat at the microscope in the front room while Ross and his library were in the back where he could meet with students. Ross's warmth and welcoming, low-key manner drew me back to the office time and time again. I noticed the journal "Evolution" on his shelf and he let me borrow a few issues and gave me permission to work in the UVM natural history collections down the hall from his office on the second floor of the Marsh Life-Sciences building. There I met Ross's grad student and spider expert John Kochalka (now at a natural history museum in Paraguay), who subsisted on a daily diet of rice and canned mackerel. There were a few other grad students around too. This was an interesting place to talk about field biology,

evolution and natural history collections.

Slowly over the fall semester, as I collected and identified insects, my interest in them and in evolution grew. I managed to collect some fairly rare beetles along the Lake Champlain shoreline in Shelburne (*Carabus maeander* was one that I recall), and over that next winter and spring began to make the mental shift from birds to beetles. Ross had endless patience and helped me learn to key out beetles using old tomes like Blatchley's 1910 monumental, 1386-page treatise of the *Beetles of Indiana* and Carl Lindroth's equally voluminous 1961 series on *The Ground-Beetles of Canada and Alaska*.

Ross read his lectures to the small classes he taught, and his famously dry humor kept the facts of insect biology alive. He would make an offhand remark about almost slipping while carrying vials of bubonic plague when he was working for the Army, and we had no idea if he was serious. The lab part of the courses was quiet, of course, as our work was with the microscope, with his handouts and the specimens in front of us. Sometimes Ross would spend the two hours of lab time learning to use a new set of keys to identify some group of animals he did not know well, such as freshwater snails or slugs. Most often, Ross would just sit quietly on a high stool near a bookstand with Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, and work his way through the brief entries so that whenever a hand would go up, he could easily pop over to answer a question or help identify an insect body structure. I would later use his handouts to develop a course in insect morphology in graduate school.

In the spring of 1979, I took Ross's General Entomology course and made the decision to switch to the Zoology Department and a life in insect biology. I remember confiding my personal struggle between birds and insects that winter to Professor Charles Woods who reassured me to follow my heart and that there would always be birds. I saw Charlie Woods last summer again, after 40 years, and we laughed together over the story. Along the way I made many



## Completing the Naturalist's Circle (continued)

friends among the other naturalist students, including moss expert Mark Rahill who was the only other student in Ross's invertebrates course who came to lab after hours to use the microscopes. Mark and I are friends to this day, as are many of the others I met during those heady days of natural history courses, the 'ologies- at UVM, including Chris Rimmer, the founding director of Vermont Center for Ecostudies.

Ross brought together an unusual cast of characters that overlapped in part with the botany clan circled around Dave Barrington in the Pringle Herbarium. We were the naturalists and we had discovered each other and our passions for nature largely thanks to Ross and Dave. I have felt breathless ever since, warmed by the realization that there are others who share this passion and interest, and with whom I like to spend time. That's the key to picturing a life I think, whether in science, art or whatever brings us joy, and it's something I often share with students. Ross was the first mentor who gave me time and opened his door in a way that made a difference in my thinking and life choices. He gave me the confidence to stick with it. Dave Barrington was the second. My other UVM professors, ornithologist Dave Capen, mammologist Charlie Woods and algologist Phil Cook, were also key. Ironically, this experience of taking the higher-level organismic courses first, leaving the so-called foundational courses of chemistry, physics and calculus for later when one is already inspired, is just the formula that my Harvard friend and predecessor E.O. Wilson advocates now and that reminds me of Ross's approach. You don't inspire architects by teaching them to make bricks. You start with the Parthenon and Stonehenge.

As I was approaching graduation in 1981, I decided I might study carabid beetle evolution and asked Ross if he would accept me as a graduate student. Ross gracefully and gently said no, that as much as he liked me personally he thought I should go elsewhere for graduate school. Disappointed, I thought of carabid expert Phil Darlington at the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ) at Harvard, but Ross said he was no longer taking students. I ended up applying to only one university, University of Maryland, and only because Ross had learned that a younger carabid expert colleague, Terry Erwin of the Smithsonian Institution, was involved in a new joint program in insect systematics between the museum and U.

Maryland.

Off I went to Maryland and D.C., promising myself it would be at most five years before I returned to Vermont. After a postdoc at Cornell, and during a first job at the University of Colorado, Ross's position was advertised and Dave Barrington suggested I apply. I held off and Harvard soon opened the Darlington position that I have held now for 25 years. I saw Ross only infrequently as the years passed though I spoke with him after his retirement about the future of the natural history collections at UVM. A token of my time with Ross at UVM surfaced around 15 years ago when I hired his former student, Jessica Rykken, to help direct a five-year inventory of the arthropods of the Boston Harbor Islands National Park. This was a project with a strong citizen science aim and was inspired by my 1981 UVM senior thesis, advised by Ross Bell, Dave Barrington and Hub Vogelmann, which was centered on a biological inventory of Shelburne Bay Park. Jessica arrived in Cambridge very well prepared and in the first weeks discovered that the wooden insect pinning block she had been using for years in her Ph.D. thesis (from Portland State University), a cheap student model from BioQuip, had my name underneath where I had scrawled it in red ink at UVM over twenty years earlier. Jessica and I laughed about this and she mentioned it to Ross whom she continued to visit and consult with over the course of our project.

One of the many articles about the Boston island fauna that Jessica and I published together was a re-discovery of a European carabid species, and was co-authored with another Ross Bell protégé, Bob Davidson of the Carnegie Museum, with whom I had also worked on yet another biological inventory-- in the Dominican Republic. Needless to say, Ross's emphasis on the importance of documenting the surprisingly little-known insects, even of such long-studied places as New England or Hispaniola, is a thread that continues to connect his students.

I visited Ross and Joyce at Wake Robin a few years ago, and we shared old stories and talked about singing insects and the new audio-recording technology and Lang Elliott's wonderful recordings. They seemed happy and well at the time.

Largely because of Ross Bell, the UVM natural history collections remain in my heart and mind. Last spring, I was honored when Dave Barrington asked me to join the new UVM Natural History Museum advisory

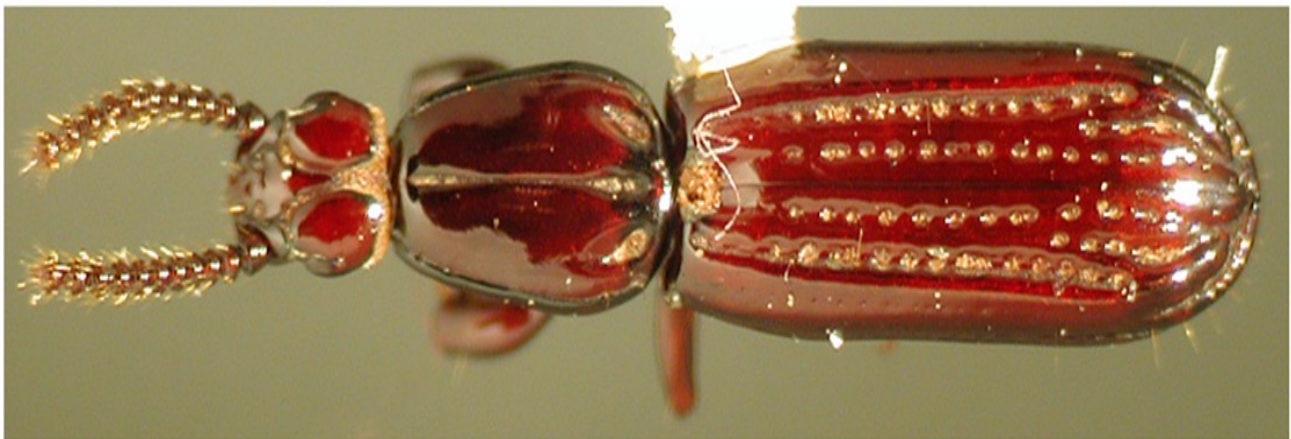


## Completing the Naturalist's Circle (continued)

board, completing the circle. I look forward to seeing how I can help beyond writing letters. At Harvard, I pretty much have the position that Ross filled at UVM. I am Curator in Entomology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology and have overseen the care, use, and digitization of our insect collections (~7.5M specimens) for a quarter century now. Along the way, I have managed National Science Foundation grants to curate and digitize our pinned and fossil insect collections and, like Ross, I have integrated teaching and mentoring of undergraduate and graduate students with use of these collections, including collecting new material from the field. I wish Ross could have seen how the new fields of molecular biology have matured past their early rivalry for space and resources with natural history collections. Now we can retrieve genomes from museum specimens and capture and share images for identifications with colleagues around the world. Facebook is alive with natural history interest groups and members race to provide identifications of photographed specimens. It's amazing how many expert naturalists there are out

there, in nearly every country. Natural history collections are also more valuable than ever, partly because insects are disappearing for unexplained reasons. The implications of this are frightening.

The UVM collections that Ross Bell helped build are an integral part of the network of natural history collections of New England and are as central to the educational mission of the UVM Biology Department as their counterparts at Harvard are to our Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology mission, where they are prominent in every outside review and training grant application and a key element in recruiting faculty and graduate students. Ross Bell was the key to building these collections at UVM and, along the way, inspiring generations of students to include natural history in our lives, however we can. I owe my career to Ross and my other mentors and will be forever grateful for his time and perspective. He was a kind and generous soul.



*Clinidium darlingtoni* Bell. Photo: Brian Farrell

Courtesy of the MCZ Entomology Department, and copyright President & Fellows of Harvard College.

### **VES Pot Luck / Planning Meeting March 22, 2020 (11 a.m. – 2 p.m.):**

All arthropod enthusiasts are invited to join us to share photos and stories of the past year's finds and select dates and sites for this summer's field trips and events. Please bring a dish to share...and a friend.

**Directions:** Vermont Agriculture and Environmental Laboratory (VAEL), Admin Dr, Randolph Center, VT 05061. Take I-89 Exit 4 (Randolph) and go East on Rt. 66 toward VT Technical College (VTC) campus. When you reach VTC, continue straight onto campus and look for the VAEL building on the left below a hill. Park in the rear of the building and enter on the far left

## Friends, Colleagues and Adventurers

By Jessica Rykken

I first met Ross Bell when I enrolled in Field Zoology at the University of Vermont. It was 1993, I was a graduate student in the Field Naturalist Program, and my friend Jeff encouraged me to take the class. The Field Naturalist program focused on landscape-level botany, geology and ecology. I'd never had a big passion for insects, so this was a reach.

I don't remember if I had any idea what I wanted to do with my degree, but Field Zoology with Ross Bell set me on a new trajectory. Each lecture was full of amazing details about creatures I had almost entirely overlooked for 30 years, delivered in Ross' understated and completely-captivating style. The first time I examined a candy-striped leafhopper under the dissecting scope, my fate was sealed. I went on to collect 9,000-and-some carabid beetles for my final project, and with Ross' guidance, I identified them all, analyzed the results, and wrote my first publication.

That was the beginning of my career in entomology, and my relationship with both Ross and Joyce. I continued to learn about carabids and other insects on VES field trips and in the lab, and although I left Vermont a few years later, I stayed "in the family" when I moved to Corvallis, OR, met Ross' sister Martha, and did graduate work with Andy Moldenke, who had been mentored by Ross as a college student.

I returned to New England to work on an insect inventory on the Boston Harbor Islands and have very fond memories of annual trips to Burlington to meet with Bob Davidson and Ross (sometimes in such cramped lab space that the three of us could barely fit) to look over my island carabids. I felt so privileged to be in the company of these legendary carabidologists who were obviously so fond of each other and so generous with their expertise. During that time (2010), I was part of the group that organized BellFest to celebrate the careers of Ross and Joyce. What fun it was to meet with the many generations of ground-beetle fanatics who could trace their lineage back to the Bells.

A few years later, I was lucky enough to help assemble Ross' volume on the *Carabidae of Vermont and New Hampshire*, along with Trish Hanson, Luke Curtis, Bob Davidson and Kent McFarland. Combing through almost 500 accounts of species that Ross and Joyce had documented across northern New England really drove home how devoted they were to this

group of beetles and this place. Of course, their taxonomic passions went beyond New England and carabid beetles, but for me, the meticulous detail recorded in these pages defined their careers and our connection.

I now live in Alaska and work as an entomologist for Denali National Park, a dream job. It's a long way from Vermont, and I don't work with beetles much, but I think of Ross and Joyce often: their passion for their work and their community, their low-key and funny charm, and the generations they've inspired, with me among them. How lucky we all are to have been their friends, colleagues, and fellow adventurers.



Jessica Rykken with carabids

## Keen Influences and Profound Effects

By Trish Hanson

Ross Bell's death on November 9, 2019, had a profound effect on many of us. I, for one, found myself reflecting on Ross's keen influence on my life and career. I recalled his unique teaching style, dry humor, and indefatigable ability to share in the excitement of discovery, even if my observations were of insects that he'd seen many times before. I always looked forward to and enjoyed our interactions, leaving each time with a new idea or story to reflect upon. He was a favorite member of my doctoral committee, reminding me why I had pursued entomology in the first place, freeing my mind of the academic "obligations" and hoop-jumping involved in earning a PhD, and focusing my attention and fascination on the almost unbelievable lives and behaviors of insects and other invertebrates.

John Spence, another former student who is now a professor emeritus at the University of Alberta, remarked that for him Ross's death was similar to losing a parent, as Ross and Joyce were "my core support and guidance as I navigated the 'difficult' years of transitioning from a rambunctious and mischievous adolescent to (I think) a rational adult with a useful mission in life." Ross aptly rekindled John's childhood interest in natural history and his association with Ross and Joyce "led me to understand that it could be a career path and prompted me to take that turn in the road."

Shortly after Ross's death, Jessica Rykken, also one of his students, wrote, "Even though it's been quite a few years since I last saw Ross and Joyce, I really feel this loss. I wouldn't be working as an entomologist in Alaska today (in many ways, a dream job), if it weren't for Ross. And I think there are lots of us out there, who aspired to become half as passionate about weird and wonderful organisms that nobody else much notices or cares about."

Ross's history and academic achievements are well documented in the Pensoft ZooKeys publication that was written after our BellFest celebration. I encourage you to check out the proceedings of the symposium (see links below) to learn more about the life and accomplishments of these remarkable people.

I think readers might especially appreciate the first three papers. Robert Davidson's Preface begins,

"What can you say about a man who could reel off the catalogue of Popes from Peter to present, could recite the list of English monarchs from 1066 to Elizabeth II (and many pre-Norman ones as well) and was well versed in the world's most obscure religions, and could even make jokes in pidgin?"

You can read the second paper, 'Bellography': Life and Contributions of Ross and Joyce Bell, two New England Naturalists by John Spence, George Ball, Robert Davidson and Jessica Rykken, to learn about his early family life, schooling, how Joyce (an excellent illustrator and microscopist) came into his life and what "Team Bell" accomplished and published.

In the third paper, Ross and Joyce Bell as Mentors at the University of Vermont, David S.



**Trish Hanson**

Photo: Kathy Decker

Barrington, who studies "prudish ferns", comments that it was Ross's "obsession with the animals that most deeply affects his students, and it is the adoption of this passion in their own work that has led to their success and thus his as a mentor. Ross modeled some key behaviors, imitated by his students, that allowed success in this most obscure discipline of ours."

I am so grateful that I had a chance to talk with Ross the day before he passed. He was lucid and thoughtful and very much himself. I was able to convey to him how important he was in my life and in my career choice, and we even had a

few smiles over past events. Like so many others, I fell under the spell of this singular naturalist, remarkable taxonomist, and beloved friend.

### References:

Proceedings of a symposium honoring the careers of Ross and Joyce Bell and their contributions to scientific work. Burlington, Vermont, 12–15 June

2010: <https://zookeys.pensoft.net/issue/360/>

Preface: <https://zookeys.pensoft.net/article/2979/>  
'Bellography': Life and Contributions of Ross and Joyce Bell, two New England Naturalists:  
<https://zookeys.pensoft.net/article/2978/>

Ross and Joyce Bell as Mentors at the University of Vermont: <https://zookeys.pensoft.net/article/2977/>

## A Gift for Wit

By Judy Rosovsky

To my mind, Ross Bell is as iconic a figure in the entomological world as Camel's Hump is in the topographical realm. His and Joyce's numerous contributions to science are outstanding, as are the books and articles he developed or inspired.

I will always remember him, though, for his wit. His humor was underappreciated by the undergraduates he taught, but my fellow graduate students and I would fully enjoy the atrocious puns that he would drop unexpectedly into his lectures, generally during a slog through the anatomy of insect innards or some other riveting topic. I often wondered if the field trips he took us on were extensions of his humor. Surely bark beetles and particular ant species could be found somewhere other than at the top of really steep slopes or inaccessible rocky crags?

Another field trip that stands out in my mind is when we went to the Huntington Audubon. It was remarkably accessible, so I waded into a pond and encouraged others to do so. Dr. Bell was smiling at us. As I climbed out of the water he said "That's a great way to find leeches. There are some unusual ones around here – check your legs". My fellow students leapt out of the water when they heard that.

Many people were influenced by the Bells, including many of my friends and colleagues and some of the University of Vermont's excellent Field Naturalists, who went on in their careers with a

thorough grounding in and appreciation of entomology. As a tiny indication of the number of students or colleagues who he influenced who went on to make their own significant contributions, I looked through the names of collectors and identifiers on two carabid beetle specimen drawers from the VT Agency of Natural Resources Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation collection.

Not all of them took Dr. Bell's Field Zoology class, but they all knew the Bells and their work. That distinguished group includes Trish Hanson, former VES officer and VT's recently retired and greatly missed forest entomologist; Dan Dillner, a Forest, Parks and Recreation Forest Protection staff member; Jim Boone, former UVM student and staff member and current Entomology Collection Manager at the Bishop Museum in Hawaii; and the late Johnny Barrows, another humorous fellow whose absence is a loss to the state. There is no room for full representation; many others could be included in this list, too.

Dr. Bell's detailed knowledge of Vermont's natural history and people was unparalleled, his understanding of insects advanced our comprehension, and he served as a central figure around which our insect loving community could gather. He will be missed.



Carabid beetles from the VT ANR FPR collection: *Harpalus caliginosus*, *Chlaenius sericeus*, *C. cordicollis* Photo by Judy Rosovsky

## Zadock Thompson Open House Nov. 9, 2019

By Zoe Albion, Collections Manager

The Zadock Thompson Invertebrate Collection at the University of Vermont enjoyed a very active fall semester, which closed with an open house on Saturday, November 9th. The event included a showing of some of the museum's best specimens, both local and international. Volunteers answered questions and demonstrated digitization and other routine tasks that keep the collection safe and productive. Cole Logan, a museum volunteer, brought a number of his own live specimens for guests to look at, touch, and even hold.

The event drew about 50 visitors, including college students, young children, local naturalists, and other community members. Staff and volunteers hope that by seeing and interacting with the collection, the community will become more excited about invertebrates, natural history, and the preservation of all things creepy and crawly.

For more information on the Zadock Thompson Invertebrate collection, please e-mail [uvm.vtzt@gmail.com](mailto:uvm.vtzt@gmail.com). The museum is not currently open to the public but visits may be coordinated on request.



Zoe Albion (gesturing) at Open House  
Photo: Michael Sabourin

## Field Trips and Pot Lucks

By Laurie DiCesare

My favorite memories of Dr. Ross Bell are from VT Entomological Society field trips and pot lucks. In 1993, when the VES was just getting started, I was drawn in by the camaraderie and expertise of the participants. Everyone was eager to help you identify whatever you caught in your net or photographed...or gladly pointed you to someone, like “the beetle guy”, who could. At the beginning and end of our informal gatherings, a few people would often gather around Ross and Joyce with samples in hand asking for help and/or debating about an insect’s identification.

Years later, one field trip to the Missisquoi Refuge still stands out. As a group of entomologists and avid enthusiasts began gathering in the parking lot, Joyce helped Ross into his wheel chair. There was no trail through the knee- to waist-high vegetation, so Ross stationed himself at the edge of the gravel where he could watch us fanning out across the field and into the shrubbery. After 10 minutes of searching, several people headed back to Ross to share the excitement of their finds. A circle slowly formed around the teacher as he peered at each insect in hand with a 10x lens, then extolled in amazing detail about the insect’s habits, relationships, identity and sometimes rarity in Vermont, all from personal experience and years of acquired knowledge. One could easily see that Ross loved sharing and his students respected his

entomological wit and wisdom.

What makes me smile most about the moment was not only the shared joy of special insects “finds” but the inclusiveness of the event. Newcomers were welcomed by longtime members who shared their nets as well as their expertise and excitement. Young children and elders were honored and, if need be, offered assistance to enhance their experience.

When Ross could no longer manage field trips, our spring pot luck / planning meetings were held at Wake Robin in Shelburne, a retirement community where he lived with Joyce. At the last luncheon he attended, Ross was still holding court with his colleagues, providing poignant commentary and sparring with Joyce. We will miss Ross’s presence in our community, but because of his generous spirit, prolific writing and love of teaching, his legacy will continue to live on through his colleagues and upcoming generations of insect enthusiasts.

During a field trip, Dr. Bell noticed me trying to photograph an elusive 6-Spotted Tiger Beetle, so mentioned that tiger beetles usually alight several times along an open path then stop to rest. That’s when you take the photo. Remembering his advice, I now take better insect photos, for which I am very grateful.



6-Spotted Tiger Beetle (*Cincindella sexguttata*), Family Carabidae. Photo: Laurie DiCesare



## **Biodiversity University: 2020 Field Courses for Naturalists:**

“BioU offers in-depth nature study taught by the region’s finest experts and educators.” For more information on additional programs (geology, photography, mushrooms, mosses...) and course registration please visit [BiodiversityUniversity.org](http://BiodiversityUniversity.org).

## **Dragonflies & Damselflies: Identification and Field Techniques:**

Bryan Pfeiffer (July 10 – 12) Fee: \$425.

## **Freshwater Macroinvertebrates:**

Declan McCabe (July 18 – 19) Fee \$295.

## **Tracks & Sign of Insects and Other Invertebrates:**

Charley Eiseman (Aug. 15-16) Fee \$295.

## **Eagle Hill Institute Summer Seminars for 2020:**

Eagle Hill institute, located in Steuben, Maine, offers week-long and week-end field-based natural history programs. Some of the arthropod-related programs are noted here. For a complete list (including medicinal plants, mushrooms, art and poetry...) please see [www.eaglehill.us/programs](http://www.eaglehill.us/programs), e-mail [office@eaglehill.us](mailto:office@eaglehill.us), or call 207-546-3042.

## **Tardigrades: Ecology, Identification and Biology:**

Emma Perry (Jun 7 – 13)

## **Native Bees: Biology, Ecology, Identification and Conservation:**

Sara Bushmann and Kalyn Bickerman-Martens (June 28-July 4)

## **Tracks and Signs of insects and Other Invertebrates:**

Charley Eiseman (July 5 – 11)

## **Moths and Butterflies: Identification, Specimen Preparation and Taxonomy:**

Paul Dennehy (July 26 – Aug. 1)

## **Spider Ecology, Identification, Biology and Photography:**

Kefyn Catley (Aug. 9 – 15)

## **Trichoptera of E. North America: Morphology...:**

John Morse and Paul Frandsen (Aug. 23 – 29)



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