



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

Coming Activities

April

- April 6 – Waterfowl Trip
- April 7 – Montezuma Field Trip
- April 13 – Earth Day, Milford
- April 16 – DOAS Board Meeting
- April 19 – DOAS Program
- April 20 – Snipe and Woodcock
- April 23 – Earth Day, SUCO

May

- May 5 – Spring Bird Walk
- May 11 – Greenway Bird Walk
- May 15 – Wildflower Walk
- May 17 – DOAS Program
- May 18 – May Big Day Bird Count
- May 19 – Charlotte Forest
- May 21 – DOAS Board Meeting
- May 25 – South Hill Bird Walk
- May 26 – Schoharie Birds/Brunch

June

- June 2 – Birds, Brunch & Beer (*see pages 4-5 for details*)

More information on page 7

**All DOAS programs
are free and open
to the public**

Mercury Rising

Mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants has lost its media hype over the past few decades; but now we are paying the price for this media lapse: even though the EPA several years ago enacted the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards Rule for power plants to reduce their mercury output by 90%, one wonders if there will be in place any oversight to ensure compliance. Because of its political power, the coal industry has avoided direct mercury regulations, despite its belching output of more than 50 tons of neurotoxin a year. Meanwhile, in 2011 researchers discovered high levels of mercury contamination on Dome Island, a 16-acre Nature Conservancy preserve on Lake George. It has long been known that mercury contaminates fresh-water lakes, fish, and thus fish-eating birds, especially loons and eagles. According to Tim Tear, director of science for The Nature Conservancy in New York, “Mercury used to be considered just a loon and lakes problem.” However, we now know from studies on Dome Island and throughout the Northeast that mercury pollution has affected all of wildlife: birds, mammals, and insects—far more species in far more habitats than previously thought. Researchers have discovered that red-eyed vireos, chickadees and song sparrows have the highest mercury levels of upland forest songbirds in the Northeast.

Mercury exposure is, of course, a risk for people as well as wildlife; humans, however, can control their mercury intake while wildlife cannot choose to avoid eating mercury contaminated prey.



Song Sparrow, by Dave Kiehm

A highly potent neurotoxin, mercury adversely affects the central nervous system of humans and wildlife, the primary consequences being reproductive and neurological problems—and behavioral abnormalities: birds, for example, lay fewer eggs, have trouble sitting on their eggs long enough for them to hatch, and have difficulties caring for their young.

In a new study titled “Hidden Risk”, Dr. Evers, director of the Biodiversity Research Instituted in Gorham, Maine, examined more than 6,500 blood samples from birds in eleven Northeast states. The more he looked for mercury, the more he found. He even sampled little brown bats and found alarming levels of mercury. Dr. Evers

(continued on page 6)

President's Message

Uninvited Guests?

They're back! Cowbirds, house sparrows and starlings – those uninvited guests - were missing from our feeders all winter, though they may have been feasting at yours. Certainly they'd been lurking not far away – perhaps 100 miles to the south in the case of the cowbirds, but as close as the nearest village in the valley in the case of the house sparrows and starlings; there they found ample food and better shelter than at our windy upland farm. Uninvited or not, they caused some excitement when they returned to our property in March - some of the first harbingers of spring in a snowy month. Soon we'll perhaps be thinking of them as pests, as do most birders.

These three species are interlopers; none are native to eastern New York, and only the cowbird is native to North America, where at one time it was found primarily in the short-grass ecosystem of the western plains. Here cowbirds mingled with herds of bison and later of free-range cattle, feeding on the insects stirred up by millions of hooves. Cowbirds



Starling, by Dave Kiehm

are "brood parasites": the females build no nests, but lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species. Here the young are incubated and raised by hapless foster parents whose own true offspring often perish as the larger cowbird nestling crowds them out of food and space. At a DOAS program last year Hartwick College ornithologist Peter Fauth, who studied brood parasitism of wood thrushes by cowbirds in Indiana, made an interesting suggestion: the cowbirds' "cuckoo habit" probably was originally an adaptation to the gypsy existence they led, following the moving herds on the prairie. Here the cowbirds seldom remained in one location long enough to settle down to nest-building and raising their own brood; rather, they found ready-built nests of other species and enlisted them as surrogate parents. Now, here in the East, cowbirds no longer need to be gypsies; the dairy farms and hayfields they depend on for food do not move, and the cowbirds stay with us from spring to fall. But they remain brood parasites: wood warblers, vireos and thrushes now raise the cowbird young. Had our forebears not cleared forests and altered the landscape to suit them, cowbirds probably would never have moved east.

Humans are responsible even more directly for our house sparrows and starlings. Both species were deliberately introduced to eastern cities from Europe in the 1800's and deliberately reintroduced when the first introductions failed. House sparrows are only distantly related to native North American sparrows, being classified into a separate family, the Weavers. One difference from native sparrows is obvious at our feeders: house sparrows are a much more noisy, gregarious, flocking tribe than are most species of native sparrow. Introduced to our cities before the era of motor vehicles,

(continued on page 3)

THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

AUDUBON SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1968

NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Helen McLean

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Membership*:	Andy Mason
Programs*:	Eleanor Moriarty
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Oneonta, NY 13820

Email: info@doas.us

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To contribute notes or articles for

The Belted Kingfisher, email:

editor@doas.us

Conservation and Legislation

Moratorium on fracking debated in Albany—legislation to place a two-year moratorium on hydrofracked gas drilling in NY State was approved overwhelmingly by the State Assembly in March. This pause would allow for full, unbiased health assessment of the impacts of hydrofracking before the state decides on whether to allow this dangerous practice of injecting chemicals underground to free up natural gas.

Unfortunately, the moratorium faces a challenge in reaching the floor of the State Senate, and one of the primary obstacles is local Senator James Seward. As part of the Senate's Republican leadership, Seward has a major voice in determining which measures come up for a vote. He is on record as opposing the moratorium legislation, even though hydrofracking would greatly impact his constituents, and is opposed by a majority of residents. In addition, numerous municipalities in his district have enacted bans or moratoriums of their own—demonstrating the depth of local concern over this activity.

With Republicans having a tenuous grip on control of the Senate, Seward's position is very important on this issue. If he hears from a significant number of constituents that he should at a minimum support an up or down vote on the moratorium, he could change his ways.

What you can do—Contact Senator Seward

NY State Senate, Albany, NY 12247
(518) 455-3131
seward@senate.state.ny.us

and urge him to support the moratorium legislation in the Senate. Remind him that much of his district includes the Marcellus shale region that would be drilled, and that protection of our ground and surface water, as well as human health, should be his highest concerns.

(Uninvited Guests?, continued from page 2)

flocks of house sparrows at that time were more popular than they are today; they helped control the fly populations that bred in the ubiquitous piles of horse dung that littered the streets.

Starlings were first successfully introduced to America in 1890, through the indirect agency of William Shakespeare! Eugene Schieffelin, a determined member of New York's American Acclimation Society and a Shakespeare aficionado, made it his personal goal to introduce to America every English bird species mentioned in the bard's plays – and he mentioned starlings!

At least in the case of this species, soon to become one of our country's commonest birds and a serious agricultural pest, Schieffelin succeeded beyond his wildest dreams!

Ask President Obama to limit CO₂—In his State of the Union message, President Obama said, “We will respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that failure to do so would betray our children and future generations.” Now it is time for him to follow through on this pledge, and the most effective and direct method would be to use his authority to direct the Environmental Protection Agency to set limits on carbon pollution from the nation's largest source: the power sector.

In the United States, electric power plants emit more than two billion tons of carbon dioxide each year, or roughly 40 percent of total emissions. The Clean Air Act can be used to place limits on this discharge, much as it has been used to reduce sulfur and nitrogen oxide emissions and significantly improve our air quality.

Global warming is perhaps our greatest environmental and public health threats, and an increasing body of science shows that it is already affecting our climate and our birds.

The President needs to order the EPA to set CO₂ emission standards for existing power plants immediately. Not only would this reduce atmospheric pollution, but it would encourage development and implementation of renewable energy sources, another stated priority of President Obama.

What you can do—Remind the President of his State of the Union statement, and tell him we know where the pollution is—now let's go get it. He can make a significant and important in protecting the future generations he refers to, as well as putting the nation on a path to a sustainable energy future.

The White House, Washington, DC 20500
(202) 456-1111
www.whitehouse.gov/contact

~ Andy Mason

Can one choose a favorite among these three bad actors? I confess that I like the dreamy musical musings of starlings high in our big maple – and they are more “native” to our farm than the other two. Starlings were already nesting in the eaves of the barn when Alice and I moved here in 2001 – but when I volunteered the next year to help tally breeding birds for the New York Atlas project, I had to go to town to find house sparrows, and to an active nearby dairy farm to find cowbirds. Now, in the warmer months, I just have to look in our back yard. So – are these birds really “uninvited guests”? No - they actually are taking advantage of the same welcome mat – the same invitation - as the returning grosbeaks and finches we really are trying to attract!

Joe Richardson

DELAWARE OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY
presents



Birds
runch &
eer

Join us for our first
Birds, Brunch & Beer at the Ommegang Brewery!

June 2, 2013

11am - 4pm

\$30 per person

- Morning bird walk
- Coffee
- View raffle and silent auction items
- Tasty Ommegang brunch
- Mike Burger - Director of Conservation and Science, Audubon, NY - Presentation
- Workshops: Limited to 15 participants!

9am - 11am

- **Workshop 1** - Birding by Ear - Andy Mason & Becky Gretton

2:30pm - 4pm

- **Workshop 2** - Decoy use and construction - Now and then - Jonathon Dowdall
- **Workshop 3** - Photographing Birds - Warren Greene
- **Workshop 4** - Botanical Painting - Supplies included - Dave & Ann Kiehm

(Limited to 60 people, so be sure to sign up early!)

For registration information call Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435 - 2054

OR

view at www.doas.us

**John G. New Audubon
Summer Day Camp Returns**

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society is now accepting pre-registrations for the John G. New Audubon Day Camp at Franklin Mountain Sanctuary. Adventures in Nature will run from July 22 through July 25, 2013 from 9:30 AM to 3 PM each day and is available for children entering grades 3-6 in the fall.

The program provides fun, hands-on experiences in natural science and environmental education through field investigations, crafts and games.

Campers will explore a variety of habitats and learn about creatures that live there. There is limited space in this program, so registrations will be accepted on a first come, first served basis. Registration forms and additional information are available for download from the DOAS website at doas.us. If you need additional information, please contact Susan O’Handley at 607-643-5680.



Camper with an eft

**DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SPRING FUNDRAISING EVENT
JUNE 2, 2013**

BIRDS, BRUNCH & BEER

Our chapter’s educational goal is to expand and enhance outreach programs for the families of our community through grants, projects and events. Please indicate workshop choice in order of preference (i.e., 1, 2, 3 or 4):

WORKSHOP A ____ 1 2 3 4	BIRDING BY EAR 9:00AM-11:00AM-ANDY MASON AND BECKY GRETTON
WORKSHOP B ____ 1 2 3 4	DECOY USE AND CONSTRUCTION, NOW AND THEN 2:30PM-4:00PM, JONATHAN DOWDALL
WORKSHOP C ____ 1 2 3 4	PHOTOGRAPHING BIRDS 2:30PM-4:00PM, WARREN GREENE
WORKSHOP D ____ 1 2 3 4	BOTANICAL PAINTING, (SUPPLIES INCLUDED) 2:30PM-4:00PM, DAVE AND ANN KIEHM

NAME: _____ NUMBER OF PEOPLE _____

ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL: _____ (FOR BIRDS, BRUNCH AND BEER UPDATES ONLY)

TELEPHONE: () _____ \$30 EACH, AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO DOAS AND MAIL TO: DOAS, PO Box 544, ONEONTA, NY 13820

Adventures in Alaska through the Eyes of a Lens

The DOAS monthly program to be held on Friday April 19th, will present, *Adventures in Alaska through the Eyes of a Lens*. The presentation will be given, by two well-known local photographers, Gail and Nelson DuBois, whose travels and photos have received recognition in birding publications. Gail DuBois has received awards for her photos that capture songbirds, in particular bluebirds in their natural habitat. The DuBois always bring wonder and excitement with their photos to the audience.



Horned and tufted Puffins

Program starts at 7:30 PM, at the Elm Park United Methodist Church at 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Free and open to the public, and refreshments are served. For further information please contact: Eleanor Moriarty at 607-435-2054

Nominees for Director Positions Starting May 2013

The Nominating Committee consisting of Dianne Benko, Barbara Marsala, Joe Richardson and Tom Salo has presented a slate of nominees for the position of Director.

Bob Donnelly, Eileen Kline, Eleanor Moriarty, Susan O'Handley, Stephen Rice, Joe Richardson, and Julie Smith are nominated for two year terms that begin after the election on May 17, 2013. Becky Gretton is nominated to fill out the remaining year of a currently open Director position.

The election of Directors will take place immediately before the program at Elm Park Church on May 17.

Tom Salo

May Big Day Bird Count

Saturday May 18 is this year's Big Day for DOAS, the day on which small groups enjoy trying to locate the maximum number of bird species in any amount of time they choose within that 24 hours. Everyone is welcome, novice or experienced. If you are interested and have not participated before, please contact Bob Miller at 607-432-5767 to join or start a group. People who have participated before will be contacted by their leaders. Leaders will receive materials before the count. The DOAS data obtained are pooled with that of the Delhi Bird Club for a report of the results in *The Belted Kingfisher*. Wish for favorable weather and southerly winds the night before.



Chestnut-sided Warbler
by Dave Kiehm

Bob Miller

(Mercury Rising, continued from page 1)

discovered that contamination levels were highest in marshes and beaver ponds and also found that "threshold levels at which some species begin to feel the effects of mercury are much lower than previously thought." He found that the ability of bird eggs to hatch is reduced 30% when levels of mercury are greater than 1.7 parts per million. Joanna Burger, a behavioral ecologist at Rutgers University, has studied contamination in terns, skimmers and other shore birds, saying that these species and others are like the canaries in a coal mine: they indicate the persistent danger of mercury pollutants for humans and for all wildlife. Dr. Evers and Burger are hopeful that new EPA guide lines to reduce mercury emissions in the US will begin to help; but as the Chinese are building new coal-fired power plants every month, some argue that new restrictions in the US will accomplish nothing.

The bottom line is that mercury pollution is rising worldwide, and it is an acute problem in our own Northeast. If you want to take action, contact your representatives and urge them to pass legislation that has been introduced to Congress to monitor mercury pollution: (S. 1183 in the Senate and H.R. 3391 in the House). Support environmental organizations of your choice, and spread the word that songbirds and many other creatures are dying from mercury poisoning.

"What people don't realize is that our rain isn't just acidic; it is neurotoxic,"

says T. H. Tear, director of science for the Nature Conservancy in New York. *

*All information for this article has been culled from *The New York Times; Biodiversity Research Institute; National Wildlife Federation, and the Nature Conservancy.*

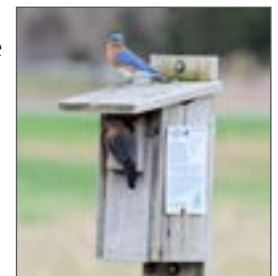
Bluebird Houses for Sale

Eastern Bluebirds—favorites of birders everywhere, and New York's official state bird—will soon set up housekeeping in our area. Properly placed bluebird houses can help this species compete with starlings and house sparrows that have lead to its population decline.

Bluebird house plans and ready-built bluebird houses are available from DOAS. Plans are free and houses are \$13.00 each. Plans and houses can be obtained at DOAS functions or by mail. All proceeds benefit DOAS conservation and education programs.

Contact Andy Mason, 1039 Peck St., Jefferson, NY 12093, (607) 652-2162, AndyMason@earthling.net.

Bluebird boxes will be available for sale at our program on April 19.



Bluebird, by Dave Kiehm

Upcoming Activities

April

April 6 – Lake Otsego Waterfowl Trip: The annual spring waterfowl trip around Lake Otsego and environs will leave from Cooperstown's Lake Front Docks at the foot of Fair Street at 8 AM sharp. Co-leaders will be Matt Albright, Bob Donnelly and John Davis. Sponsored by the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society for several years, the trip has always attracted many area birders. Cars will be pooled and radio connected, and the trip will last until around noon. For more information, contact John Davis at davi7js4@hughes.net or (607) 547-9688.

April 7 – Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge Trip: Please meet at the Dietz Street parking lot, across from the YMCA in Oneonta at 7:30 AM. This is an all day trip. Please bring lunch. We should be seeing the migration of numerous ducks, snow geese, hawks and other species. For further information contact: Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054. (*Postponed from March 24*)

April 13 – Earth Festival at Milford Central School: 11 AM-3 PM Stop by and see DOAS.

April 16 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM

April 19 – DOAS Program: *Adventures in Alaska Through the Eyes of a Lens* by Gail and Nelson DuBois. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Refreshments will be served. For more information contact Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

April 20 – Snipe and Woodcock: For more information, contact Bob Donnelly at (607) 264-8156.

April 23 – Green Dragon Week at SUNY Oneonta: 10 AM-2 PM at IRC Quad. Stop by and see DOAS.

May

May 5 – Spring Bird Walk: DOAS Sanctuary, 8 AM, duration about 2 hours. Returning spring migrants including warblers, vireos, orioles, flycatchers, as well as waterfowl, can be expected.

Participants can either meet at the Sanctuary at 8 AM, or at the McDonalds in Oneonta at 7:45 AM. Trip leader is Andy Mason, 607-652-2162, AndyMason@earthling.net. The DOAS Sanctuary is located on Grange Hall Rd., outside Oneonta. Directions can be found on the DOAS website: doas.us.

May 11 – Greenway Bird Walk: For more information, contact Charlie Scheim at (607) 434-4880.

May 15 – Jean Miller Memorial Wildflower Walk: Meet at the beach, Gilbert Lake State Park, 10 AM. Leaders will be Julia Gregory, Barbara Marsala and Joe Richardson.

May 17 – DOAS Program: *Birds of Ecuador* by Rudy Gelis, biologist. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Refreshments will be served. For more information contact Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

May 18 – May Big Day Bird Count

May 19 – Charlotte Forest: For more information, contact Bob Donnelly at (607) 264-8156.

May 21 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM

May 25 – South Hill Bird Walk: For more information, contact Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

May 26 – Birds and Brunch in Schoharie: The Schoharie Land Trust is sponsoring a bird walk at its Paulson Preserve in Jefferson, Schoharie Co. at 8 AM. The walk will be followed by brunch at Buck Hill Farm for interested participants.

More information, including directions to the preserve, is available at www.schoharielandtrust.org.

June

June 2 – Save the Date: *Birds, Brunch and Beer* at the Ommegang Brewery. See page 5 for registration form or contact Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

DOAS Membership Application

Membership in the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society includes 9 issues of our newsletter, *The Belted Kingfisher*. Cost is \$15 annually or \$25 for two years. Please make your check payable to "DOAS" and mail payment with this form to: DOAS Membership Chair, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544.

Note: Please mail National Audubon renewals to address on renewal notice.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Support DOAS education and conservation programs with an additional donation: \$ _____



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Barred Owl, by Dave Kiehm

February–March Bird Sightings

Just when you thought winter was over after having some warmish sunny days here and there, a blustery blizzard dumped eight inches of snow on our area. I'm now writing this article on the first day of spring, a rather calm but coolish day. I'm reminded of T. S. Eliot's first line of *The Waste Land*. "April is the cruellest month". Could he have been wrong?

All winter long Kay Crane and Betty MacGibbon who live four miles apart on either ends of Walton village have been enjoying a visiting Red-bellied Woodpecker. Must be different birds. On 2/18 Bob Donnelly saw 4 American Wigeons at the village docks in Cooperstown and John Birkett had his FOS Turkey Vulture in Sidney. The next day Kay Crane watched a Red-winged Blackbird scratch under her feeder in Walton during a snowstorm thinking perhaps he had made a wrong turn. A small group of White-winged Crossbills foraged around Dorian Huneke's backyard in Treadwell on 2/27. A week later John Murdock had 2 pair of White-winged Crossbills at his feeder in Harpersfield, a

bird I still need to add to my life list. Dorian Huneke also heard an Eastern Screech Owl whose call, a tremolo song, is likened in one of her owl books to an electronic telephone ring sound. On 3/2 while doing barn chores in Treadwell she also heard a Barred Owl calling.

Now begins the arrival of many spring visitors. On 3/5 Sandy Bright saw her FOS Turkey Vulture lazily rocking in the blue skies over West St. in Oneonta and at her Oneonta home she heard her first singing Purple Finch with some House Finches. In the first week of March Bob Donnelly went through scads of sunflower and thistle seeds plus suet to feed 300-500 Common Redpolls along with various Woodpeckers, Mourning Doves, Dark-eyed Juncos and White-breasted Nuthatches in Cooperstown. Dorian Huneke had a few Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles in Treadwell on 3/7. The 10th of March was a big bird bonanza day. Sandy Bright saw a Brown Creeper singing its spring song in Wilber Park as a Killdeer flew overhead. She also had a singing American Robin in the backyard of her home. Edna Straney saw Purple

Finches at her feeders in Oneonta. On 3/11 Red-winged Blackbirds were seen by Gerianne Carillo in Milford, by John Davis in Cooperstown and 100's of them were seen by Jessie Savage in Hartwick. On that same day Dorian Huneke heard a FOS Song Sparrow in Treadwell, Fred Johnson saw an American Robin fly over Rt. 51 in Gilbertsville, and Jenn Carr, his daughter, watched a Bald Eagle fly over her yard and perch in a tree right near her chicken coop in Middlefield. Watch out chickens! The next day she also saw 2 male and 1 female Eastern Bluebirds there. Meanwhile Tom Salo, whose W. Burlington pond had been stocked with fathead minnows many years ago, saw 4 Hooded Mergansers and a Belted Kingfisher enjoying the bounty. To round out the spring explosion Dorian Huneke saw 2 female Brown-headed Cowbirds converge on her feeder station in Treadwell on the 13th. What can I say! Another great birding month.

If you have bird sightings to report, contact me at dbenko@frontiernet.net, or 6815 Co. Hwy 16, Delhi, NY 13753, or at 607-829-5218 for the next issue of *The Belted Kingfisher*. *Dianne Benko*