



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

Coming Activities

April

April 2 — Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge Field Trip

April 3 — Lake Otsego Waterfowl

April 9 — Earth Day Festival

April 9 — Riddell State Park

April 13 — Woodcock/Snipe walk

April 15 — Catskill Black Bears

April 22 — Riddell State Park

April 27 — Earth Day at SUCO

May

May 11 — Milford State Forest

May 20 — Birds of Costa Rica

May 20 — Glimmerglass State Park

May 21 — May Big Day Bird Count

May 26 — Gilbert Lake State Park

May 27 — Thayer Farm, Cooperstown

May 28 — Weaver Lake canoe trip

More information on page 7

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

Caribbean Escape

One reason Alice and I moved to upstate New York (from “tropical” southern Pennsylvania) was to experience *real* winters. Nevertheless, since we retired up here in 2001 the urge to travel south during the cold months has sometimes been strong - but we have seldom given in! (After all, what would our winter birds do without full feeders?) This past winter, though, we succumbed to old friends’ entreaties to join them for a January bird safari to Trinidad and Tobago - and in retrospect, this was certainly the winter to do it!

Trinidad lies at the southern end of the Caribbean’s Windward Island arc, so close to Venezuela that its biology is much more South American than Caribbean. Its more than 400 recorded bird species include a great many shared with South America, and this is the chief reason why this island is so much



Tobago Turnstone, by Joe Richardson

richer bird-wise than the smaller, more northerly Windward Islands. Another reason, though, is Trinidad’s much larger size - a third larger than the size of Rhode Island, with a human population of well over a million but numerous wild habitats nonetheless. Tobago is much smaller - the size of Martha’s Vineyard - and although only 26 miles northeast of Trinidad it is much more truly a Caribbean island. Though sharing many of its 210 recorded bird species with its larger neighbor, Tobago has several endemic forest species and hosts breeding colonies of a number of oceanic birds that do not breed on Trinidad.

Both islands boast a cadre of conservation-oriented, highly knowledgeable local guides who enthusiastically assist foreign birders



Dave and Maggie

President's Message

Signs of Spring?

As I write this on another cold and snowy day in mid March, it is very hard to believe Spring officially starts this weekend. Here on the hills above Milford, we have 15+ inches of snow in the yard. No matter what the date says, Spring seems a long way off.

Some more reliable indicators of Spring, other than the calendar, are starting to show up. Red-wing blackbirds and grackles are around most areas now. For me, the first red-wings of the season are a sure sign of better things to come. Maggie and I recently saw our first turkey vulture and have heard killdeers.

V's of both Canada and Snow geese have been streaming over the house this last week. Most excitingly is over the last 2 days our resident raven pair have been flying over the yard carrying sticks and interacting with aerobatic flight displays. They nested 125 yards from the house last year and I hope they decide to nest close again.

What is most pleasing about this time of year is the sound of bird song in the morning. The chickadees are very vocal now as are the nuthatches. The nasal kent call of the nuthatches always makes me smile. Recently the brown creepers have begun their sweet, high calls. Very musical.

I still have a hard time believing Spring is close when I look out my window but if the clues mean anything, it won't be long before I see my lawn.

Another sure sign of Spring is the beginning of our bird/nature walks. We will have diverse walks that should appeal to most everyone in our membership. Our trip leaders will cover a wide area in search of everything from displaying woodcocks, lady slipper orchids, singing warblers, grumpy bitterns and everything else that makes our area of New York a special place. Please check our web site often for dates, meeting places and start times. Hope to see everyone out with us this Spring.

Dave & Maggie
607 286 9222

kiehm@occhlue.com

February Field Trip

On February 26, twenty cold-hearted bird watchers participated in what has become our annual winter owl trip. Although the Short-eared Owls had departed the area a couple weeks earlier, we did find Eastern Screech Owls and Barred Owls. Numerous Red-Tailed Hawks were observed. The highlight of the day was a pair of Bald Eagles sitting on a nest near Otsego Lake. We



Coot, by Dave Kiehm

also had great looks at hundreds of Snow Buntings and Horned Larks. Robins were also abundant. At the Cooperstown docks, we also spotted a male Redhead Duck and two Common Mergansers mixed in with the Coots and Mallards. Thanks to all who participated.

Bob Donnelly

THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

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FOUNDED 1968

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To contribute notes or articles for *The Belted Kingfisher* please send to "Kingfisher Editor" at the above address, or email:

editor@doas.us

Conservation and Legislation

Obama administration National Forest proposals

would weaken wildlife protections—This year the Obama administration will create sweeping new policies to determine the future of our national forests for generations to come. These policies, known as the Forest Planning Rule for the National Forest Management Act, lay out the “rules of the road” for the U.S. Forest Service to manage its 155 national forests and 20 grasslands nationwide, a total land area as big as Texas—all belonging to the American people. This presents an opportunity to improve protections for wildlife in these important habitats—one of the primary purposes of the National Forest system.

Among the Forest Service’s responsibilities is maintaining biodiversity in the forests. For many years, the agency has used a viability standard for this purpose. This policy works by requiring that management actions provide for the long-term persistence of fish and wildlife on our national forests. However, the Obama proposal limits the viability standard to those “species of conservation concern” determined by the local forest. There is no formal mechanism, scientific standard for determining whether a species should receive this protection, opening the process to undue influence from timber companies, oil drillers, mining companies and others seeking to exploit forest resources.

In addition, the Obama proposal fails to define what protections are required for those species that do fall under the viability standard, again leaving it to local discretion. Also, it does not provide for monitoring of populations or species diversity. The proposal does include a large loophole for local forest administrators to avoid the viability standard completely.

What you can do—Comments on the Forest Planning Rule are being accepted until May 16. Please let the Forest Service know that they need to maintain strong protections for wildlife in their future plans. Comments can be submitted at govcomments.com, or Forest Service Planning DEIS, C/O Bear West Company, 132 E 500 S, Bountiful, UT 84010. Also, Defenders of Wildlife has provided an easy way to submit comments through their web site, www.defenders.org. Sending a copy of your comments to President Obama will let him know the Forest Service needs to improve their rule.

Senators Seward and Bonacic cosponsor bill to allow larger

ATVs—Local State Senators James Seward and John Bonacic are cosponsors of dangerous legislation that would change the definition of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) to include machines weighing up to 1500 lbs., a 50% increase over the current limit of 1000 lbs. These off-road vehicles are a major cause of damage to public lands from illegal use. Increasing the size of ATVs that can be registered in the state will only worsen the problem.

DOAS was instrumental in keeping the state from opening up local state forests to ATV use several years ago. It was clear that this was an inappropriate use of these lands, and would negatively affect habitat, wildlife, water resources, and conflict with low-impact activities. However, the Department of Environmental Conservation admitted that it cannot adequately patrol the forests to keep ATVs out, and the numerous rutted and eroded paths from the machines prove this. Allowing larger, heavier machines would bring even more damage to our ecosystems.

What you can do—Contact Senators Seward and Bonacic, and tell them that they should withdraw their support of this bill. The illegal use on public and private lands with existing ATVs is bad enough. They should not be sponsoring legislation that would worsen the problem.

Addresses:

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

State Senators James Seward/John Bonacic
NY State Senate
Albany, NY 12247
Seward—(518) 455-3131 seward@senate.state.ny.us
Bonacic—(518) 455-3181 bonacic@senate.state.ny.us

Andy Mason

Membership Reminder: Please check your address on this newsletter for your membership expiration date. This date is shown by four numbers—the first two digits indicate the year and the second two digits indicate the month, i.e., ‘1106’ is June 2011. Renewal information is found on page 7 in this issue—please renew and continue your support of DOAS and our programs.

Caribbean Escape, continued from page 1

like ourselves. They are invaluable, and so energetic that we were grateful for the occasional “recovery day” when nothing was scheduled.

Both islands are drenched with natural beauty. Largely unspoiled rain forests occupy the rugged northern ranges of Trinidad and the mountainous spine of Tobago, providing habitat for many of the islands’ bird species. The Asa Wright Nature Center, occupying an overgrown coffee-and-cocoa plantation far up a rain forest valley in Trinidad, is world-renowned and has attracted other DOAS members before us: Bob and Jean Miller have led Otsego/Delaware birders there in the past and regaled us with their memories as we prepared for our own trip. Birding trails, comfortable accommodation and good food are complemented by the nature center’s famous veranda, with its view down the forested valley and its constantly replenished bird feeders that attract the “winged jewels of the forest” from dawn to dusk: a succession of motmots, tanager species, honeycreepers, antshrikes and hummingbirds that at first boggled our senses. With help over a couple of days we gradually got most of the commoner species sorted out.

From Asa Wright one can make guided forays to Trinidad’s lowlands and forested north coast. We visited the mangrove swamp where flocks of scarlet ibis arrive unforgettably at sunset to roost in the treetops, and a great freshwater swamp that is home to limpkins, red-bellied macaws, whistling ducks - and howler monkeys! Half the enjoyment - and much of the surprise - was meeting New York friends in these new places -- northern waterthrushes skulking among the mangroves, other wintering

warblers (yellow, prothonotary, redstart), black vultures (instead of gulls) blanketing the beach at Grand Riviere, and many familiar raptors (merlins, peregrines, broad-winged hawks) seeming quite at home among the tropical specialists.



*Breakfast with Tobago Turnstones,
by Joe Richardson*

For the last few days of our Caribbean escape we moved to Speyside, on the trade-wind-buffed northeast coast of Tobago, where our pleasant beach hotel faced the sanctuary island of Little Tobago across a smiling bay. Little Tobago is home to a large nesting colony of red-billed tropic birds as well as two species of booby, all visible at eye level from a spectacular high overlook. Besides Little Tobago, our guided forays from Speyside sampled most of the habitats of “Big Tobago” and many of its breathtaking, cliff-hugging roads. On days when we weren’t up and away before dawn with our guide, we were joined at breakfast and lunch in the open-air dining room by bananaquits and - most endearing of all to me - by a cheeky flock of ruddy turnstones begging for bits of egg and French fries. I like to think we helped fatten them up for their long spring migratory flight to the Arctic!

Joe Richardson

Bird Profiles

Red-winged Blackbird

An early migrant, the flash of the male Red-winged Blackbird’s red shoulder patches and his exuberant “oak-a-ree!” song, heralds spring for most North Americans.

During breeding, protein-rich insects make up the majority of the birds’ diet. Outside the breeding season, Red-winged Blackbirds mainly eat seeds.

Red-winged Blackbirds are a very common marsh bird, especially where there are many cattails. They nest in the cattails, but also in fields. Look for Red-winged Blackbirds at your feeders as they first arrive to establish territories. Red-winged Blackbirds are true harbingers of spring.



<http://www.audubon.org/species/redbla3>

Ravens Relating to Raptors

To enhance last month's slide show, I set a camera to take video clips at an active bait site. When there are large groups of ravens present, with the camera at a 1 minute delay, we can get over 500 still photographs a day. We see some interesting behavior in these still shots. However, video has given us much more insight on how different birds and species interact.

I set up the video camera at our Burlington site the evening of February 9. That site had hosted a large group of Common Ravens and several different eagles during the previous week. The camera was programmed for a 10 minute delay and a 30 second recording time. With a large number of ravens present, motion is constant. The camera is just waiting for the timer before the motion detector can trigger it again. On February 10, this resulted in a 30 second video clip every 10 minutes. It is in effect, a random sample. I was lucky to get a lot of video that day. The following day, the ravens were gone, as were the eagles.

Bernd Heinrich, in his outstanding book *Mind of the Raven*, mentions that ravens have been observed pulling eagles' tails. His research subjects also did this to domestic fowl put in their aviary. Our one day of video suggests this behavior is quite common in wild birds. Our video recorded 5% of each 10 minute period. During that small amount of filming, ravens were seen pulling the tails of 2 different Bald Eagles, a Red-tailed Hawk, and an attempt was made on a Rough-legged Hawk. The redtail was pushed - or should I say pulled - to the point of leaving. The roughie caught the raven in the act, so it backed off. Another clip shows one raven grabbing the tail of another and dragging it from the bait pile and out of the camera's field. It returns moments later to grab a different raven's tail.

I wish I had the video set up when a Golden Eagle was present. The still shots suggest ravens treat them differently from Bald Eagles. Last season, at the site John Davis maintained in

Middlefield, there was a large group of ravens, as many as 4 Bald Eagles, and 1 Golden Eagle. The eagles overlapped each other for more than 3 weeks. John observed that ravens would feed quite close to Bald Eagles. However, when the Golden Eagle arrived, ravens were absent from the photos, or could only be seen in small numbers while keeping their distance. Over a period of



Common Raven pulling the tail of a Bald Eagle

weeks, ravens would eventually get closer to the golden but never seemed as comfortable as with balds. This season in Burlington, there was a similar situation. Common Ravens surrounded Bald Eagles without hesitation. The Golden Eagle that was there one day the same week was given considerably more respect.

At some of the southern sites in this project, similar behavior has been seen. However, at one site in West Virginia with a great number of birds including "at least 10 balds, maybe 50 ravens and an as yet undetermined number of goldens (many)" - ravens were seen feeding next to both kinds of eagles. The large number of eagles at that site may have complicated the behavior of all involved.

What informs the ravens that some big raptors are different from others? Each type of eagle has comparable size and weaponry. I suspect the ravens are reading body language. We know Bald Eagles behave differently from Golden Eagles. They are more inclined to scavenge than hunt. They are more sedentary. Golden Eagles are upland hunters. If you walk in an urban park at night, you will know who the human hunters and predators are. In the same way, I believe ravens are aware of the focus and awareness shown by Golden Eagles. Golden Eagles are hunters. While Bald Eagles may see and treat ravens as a nuisance, a Golden Eagle might very well look at the same ravens as if they are prey.

Find a video of a Common Raven pulling a Bald Eagle's tail at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32yPNqZC54Y>

Tom Salo

May Big Day Bird Count

Saturday, May 21, is this year’s Big Day for DOAS, the day on which small groups enjoy trying to locate the maximum number of bird species they can 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 prior to the count. The DOAS data obtained are pooled with that of the Delhi Bird Club for a report of results in *The Belted Kingfisher*. Wish for favorable weather and southerly winds the night before.

Bob Miller



Mallard, by Dave Kiehm

Bluebirds Are Back!

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 led 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



The Black Bears of the Catskills

The April Monthly Program will be held Friday the 15th at 7:30 PM in the Elm Park United Methodist Church, located at 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

Larry Bifaro, a Wildlife Biologist for the Department of Environmental Conservation, will speak. He is in charge of management of Black Bears for 9 counties in New York State. Larry is also co-leader of New York’s Black Bear Management Team which is the statewide team of Wildlife Staff responsible for Bear Management. His expertise on Black Bear covers thirteen years in the field.

Larry estimates 1,600 to 2,000 bears live in the Catskill region. This time of year, the long winter naps end for the bears and down the mountains they come to rummage for food. Larry and his team work hard to educate



the public to learn how to properly store their garbage and stop feeding the birds in April since bird feeders are often the desired object for the bear.

The program is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

For further information contact:
Eleanor Moriarty:
607-435-2054 or
607-278-4083



Coming Activities

April

April 2 — Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge Field

Trip: In the spring, spectacular numbers of migrating ducks, geese and hawks stop to rest at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, located at the north end of Cayuga Lake. This DOAS Spring field trip will visit the lakes and marshes in the refuge and break for lunch at the green state-of-the-art Montezuma Audubon Center. On recent trips, we have observed thousands of snow geese. Raptors are often seen soaring over the waters. Towards the northern part of the refuge, a pair of Sandhill Cranes has been breeding successfully for two or more seasons. The trip will leave from the Dietz Street parking lot, across from the YMCA in Oneonta, at 7:30 AM. Carpooling is strongly encouraged, and participants can be picked up en route to Cooperstown. Return to Oneonta will be late afternoon. The trip takes a few hours each way, and participants need to pack a lunch. For further information please contact Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 278-4083.

April 3 — 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. Past trips have always found interesting waterfowl and other species. Cars will be pooled, and the trip will last until around noon. For more information, contact John Davis at (607) 547-9688.

April 9 — 6th Annual Earth Day Festival: at Milford Central School. The festival is organized by the Otsego County Conservation Association and the Wildlife Learning Company. DOAS President Dave Kiehm will be leading a bird walk in the morning (see below), and DOAS will once again have a table filled with information about local and state issues that directly affect our environment and quality of life.

April 9 — Bird Walk at Riddell State Park: led by Dave Kiehm. Since it is part of the Earth Day Festival, the walk will meet at Milford High School at 8 AM. From there we will travel (carpool) to Riddell State Park, leaving Riddell's parking lot just north of I-88 at around 8:20 AM. We will be looking for early migrants and ducks. Trails will be wet so boots are suggested for this easy, mostly level walk of about 1 1/2 hours. For more information, contact Dave Kiehm at (607) 286-9222.

April 13 — Field Trip: Woodcock/Snipe walk.

April 15 — DOAS Program: *Catskill Black Bears* by Larry Bifaro, Wildlife Biologist, DEC Region 4 (9 counties), co-leader of New York State's Black Bear Management Team. The program will begin at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Refreshments will be served. For more information contact Program Chairman Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 278-4083.

April 22 — Field Trip: Riddell State Park.

April 27 — Earth Day at the SUCO campus: DOAS will have an information table at this event. More details to be announced later.

May

May 11 — Field Trip: Milford State Forest.

May 20 — DOAS Program: *Birds of Costa Rica* by Scott and Doug Fielder.

May 20 — Field Trip: Glimmerglass State Park.

May 21 — May Big Day Bird Count.

May 26 — Field Trip: Gilbert Lake State Park.

May 27 — Field Trip: Thayer Farm, Cooperstown.

May 28 — Field Trip: Weaver Lake canoe trip.

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.

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Red-winged Blackbird, by Dave Kiehm

February - March Bird Sightings

Just as I was beginning to give up hope of seeing any common redpolls this year, my husband called me into the kitchen to point out a flock of about 20 alighting on patches of snow in our backyard. This was on February 26th, the same date our daughter gave birth to our first grandson. What a thrilling day! The following bird sightings encompass the last vestiges of winter and of course the first signs of an approaching spring.

Martha Frey had the first sighting of an Eastern Bluebird in Springfield on 2/18. Red-winged Blackbirds made their first appearance on 2/19. Terri Wetzel saw one in Morris and Trina Bassoff saw hers in Jefferson. The next day Martha Frey was pleased to see a Barred Owl perched on a birdhouse attached to a tree in her friend's yard in Phoenix Mills. From 20 ft. away she and the owl hoped it would catch a mouse or a mole but no luck. Kay Crane reported a small flock of Common Redpolls at her home in Walton on 2/23. Two days later in the middle of a

snowstorm she saw 5 brave Red-winged Blackbirds at her feeder. Hopefully their arrival was a precursor to spring ending the long blustery winter season. On 2/26 Tom and Sue Whitney spied a Northern Shrike in the Bermuda Triangle of Delhi, E. Meredith and Bloomville. Dispersing a cloud of goldfinches, redpolls, woodpeckers, chickadees and nuthatches, it finally perched on a dead limb in their yard and surveyed the area before heading out. No fatalities. The next day Gerianne Carillo saw a Bald Eagle in Milford being chased by some incognito ducks. Turkey Vultures appeared on the last day of the month. Leslie Preston saw 4 in W. Oneonta and Sandy Bright saw 6 in Oneonta.

Kristin Masters watched a Sharp-shinned Hawk circle around her feeders in South Kortright in pursuit of an American Tree Sparrow on 3/2. No life was lost. Lucky for the sparrow, unlucky for the hawk. Also on that day Gerianne Carillo had a brief visit of 12-15 American Robins to her lilac trees in Milford and Common Grackles were at Dorian Huneke's feeders in Treadwell. The next day Warren Ryther had a small

flock of Red-winged Blackbirds and a lone Rusty Blackbird at his feeders in Garrettsville. The Rusty Blackbird was the first he'd ever seen. On 3/5 Tom and Sue Whitney saw a Killdeer in Bloomville and Marge Mathis saw 4 Turkey Vultures in Oneonta. The following day John Davis reported a flock of 50 Common Grackles in Cooperstown and there was a Great Blue Heron in Butternut Creek as reported by Warren Ryther. He also finally saw this winter a flock of 20 Snow Buntings in Morris on 3/8 along with a male American Kestrel silhouetted against a backdrop of snow in all its resplendent beauty. A flock of 50 Red-winged Blackbirds visited Marilyn Huneke in Delhi on 3/9. Tom and Sue Whitney witnessed the flight of 9 flocks of Snow Geese totaling nearly 1500 birds as they flew over Scotch Hill Road in Bloomville in less than an hour (3/12). Spring is definitely here and that's thrilling news for birders.

Contact me dbenko@frontiernet.net, 6815 Co. Hwy 16, Delhi, NY 13753, 607 829-5218 for the next issue of *The Belted Kingfisher*.
Dianne Benko