

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**WATCHING WEASELS***Tom Salo*

A reporter once asked me about my obsession with birds. Maybe I got a little defensive, but my reply was entirely true. I told her I would rather watch weasels any day! A few years back, I came upon a fisher in the woods. I watched it move along a log, investigating cavities as it went. It passed the log and moved behind a tree. It never came out. I walked around the tree, examining its bare branches with my binoculars. No fisher, and, no obvious places to hide. The fisher vanished. This is the stuff of which myths are made.

Magical animals that disappear. For me, secretive and rarely seen weasels like martens and fishers are the manifestation of mystery.

Canoeing on the Unadilla one spring, in the water a paddle length away, a minx surfaced with a crayfish in its jaws. Where did that come from? Another time I watched a mink dive through a hole in the ice and surface with a dormant frog. Three bites make a meal. And, what about otters? Who could ever spend enough time watching a family of otters play?

I recently had a fisher in my 80 acre backyard. The species, which has inhabited the mountainous regions of the state for years, has moved into central New York. We started a project this winter with wildlife cameras (motion triggered cameras). We placed bait piles at 3 locations and are using the cameras to determine if Golden Eagles are present at various location in our area in winter. Last November, while I was experimenting with one of the cameras, a fisher turned up in the photos on two different days. Now I want to see the critter in person.

In E. O. Wilson's The Future of Life he examines the concept of "biophilia", or, love of life. It is a quality most of us share. The point I was trying to make with the reporter is that birds are not the only wildlife worth watching.

Birds are great. They are colorful, active during the day, and their ability to fly means they show up in unexpected places. Watching birds can be thrilling. So too is watching aphid lions. I've watched some incredible raptor chases but none were better than one fall day when I watched tens of thousands of bluefish in a feeding frenzy at my feet. My "obsession" goes way beyond birds. It is an obsession with life. Whether birds, weasels or bugs, life in its myriad forms is beautiful and fascinating.



*This fisher was
photographed in Burlington
on December 2nd.*

Tom Salo
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COVER ARTWORK BY DAVE KIEHM

CONSERVATION AND LEGISLATION

BY ANDY MASON

WETLANDS PROTECTION STILL LACKING IN NEW YORK

One of the least publicized, but worst anti-environmental actions in recent years was the 2006 US Supreme Court decision determining that the Clean Water Act did not apply to small, isolated wetlands not directly connected to larger waterways. This came about as a result of a lawsuit by the City of Chicago regarding permits required for construction.

This decision affected wetland protection nationwide. In NY State, the practical effect was to leave wetlands under 12.4 acres completely open to filling or draining, without any oversight. The 12.4 acre (10 hectare) threshold is part of NY's freshwater

wetland law. Areas smaller than this were in federal jurisdiction that now does not exist.

The conservation values of these small wetlands are significant. In addition to providing essential wildlife habitat, they reduce the extremes of flood and drought, by serving as natural sponges to retain and release waters. They also cleanse water by filtering and sequestering pollutants. Although the individual areas are not impressive, in sum, they make up a significant portion of the nation's remaining wetlands.

This gaping loophole is recognized by conservation groups, and legislation

has been drafted to give NY State authority to regulate these important areas. These bills have passed the State Assembly for several sessions, by significant majorities. However, they have never reached the floor of the State Senate for a vote. The longer this situation continues, the more wetlands will disappear in the state.

What you can do: Contact your state legislators and Governor Paterson, and let them know NY must step up and protect these critical wetland areas. The policy of the state is that wetlands are an important and irreplaceable resource. We need the legislature to take action this year.

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**ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
GRANTS AVAILABLE**

The DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY announces its ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION GRANTS for the spring of 2010. Environmental Education Grants are awarded to classroom teachers in the DOAS area (Delaware, Otsego, eastern Chenango, and western Schoharie Counties) to enable them to add new environmental education activities to the curriculum during the spring semester. The maximum award amount is \$250. Teachers may receive one grant per school year. Grants are competitive and proposals will be evaluated by a committee of the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society. For more information and an application, see our website at www.doas.us or contact Barbara Marsala at barbaramars@stny.rr.com.

2009 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

As always, since 1969, we count the birds we see in a 15 mile diameter circle centered near Milford. Our count is always the first Saturday after Dec. 13. Sat. 19 was cloudy all day with little wind and about 2 inches of snow cover, most ponds frozen and flowing water open. Field counters were 25 in 9 groups and feeder counters were 13.

We saw 6516 birds of 48 species. Unusual was 1 American Coot (never seen before) seen by John Davis' group along his Susquehanna route.

Species seen in the largest numbers ever:

Bald Eagle 3, Coopers Hawk 5, Red-bellied Woodpecker 4, and Tufted Titmouse 93.

Late lingerers: Ring-billed Gull 1, Belted Kingfisher 1, Northern Flicker 2, Song Sparrow 1, White-throated Sparrow 2, and Red-winged Blackbird 1.

The only winter-only residents seen were 2 Rough-legged Hawks, 60 American Tree Sparrows, 222 Snow Buntings and no winter finches.

The complete bird list with the numbers, along with some data from all the preceding years is on page 6.

Bob Miller

HAWKWATCH WRAPUP

The 2009 season at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch in Oneonta came to a close on New Years Day, as is the tradition. Persistent snow made for poor visibility, but the sky cleared enough after noon for two Red-tails to rise out of the valley and cut south at 12:35--the only birds of the day, and the last birds of the season.

2009 showed a fine rebound from '08's off year. The 6334 total raptors represented only the third time the watch has topped 6000 in its 21-year history, and not far behind 2003's high of 6546. Most of the increase came from a record flight of Broad-winged Hawks. Although Franklin Mountain is not noted as a big Broad-wing site, there were 6 triple-digit days in September, providing a good head start to the season.

Turkey Vultures also set a record, taking a big jump over the 9-year average since full-time counting began. This is a notoriously difficult species to accurately record, due to their wide-ranging behavior, but TVs are increasing in our region and elsewhere.

Of the other 13 regularly-sighted species, four were significantly above

the 9-year average, seven below, and two were flat. A bright spot was a relatively good year for American Kestrels, following three years of well below average counts.

Bald Eagles also posted a good year, 34% above their recent average and only three off the record of 185. The species had leveled off in recent years after steady increases for several seasons.

The opposite was true for Cooper's Hawks and Merlins, which dropped in 2009 after climbing for the past few years.

The season's high point undoubtedly came on Nov. 6, when Steve Hall tallied 46 Golden Eagles. Half of the eagles came in the two hours after noon. This was the third largest daily count of the species at Franklin Mountain.

Coverage was excellent, with counters putting in 865 hours over 128 days, only one day off the record. Once again, Steve Hall gets a Sarah Palin-style shout out for covering 3 days a week. Larry Dake, Fred Fries, Marilyn Leahy, Randy Lynch, Andy Mason, Ron Milliken, Fred Reckner, and Tom Salo carried the rest of the

load, with help from regular spotters Becky Gretton, Richard Hendrick, Andrea Lodovice, Ralph Niederlander, Leslie Preston, Bob Shultis, and numerous others.

Thanks to all for a great season!

2009 totals are below. Complete Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch statistics are available at www.hawkcount.org.

Andy Mason

2009 Totals

Turkey Vulture: 708
 Osprey: 143
 Bald Eagle: 182
 Northern Harrier: 71
 Sharp-shinned Hawk: 567
 Cooper's Hawk: 93
 Northern Goshawk: 22
 Red-shouldered Hawk: 70
 Broad-winged Hawk: 2097
 Red-tailed Hawk: 1989
 Rough-legged Hawk: 5
 Golden Eagle: 161
 American Kestrel: 135
 Merlin: 21
 Peregrine Falcon: 20
 Unidentified Raptor: 50

Total: 6334

BIRD FEEDERS AND DISEASES

Most of us enjoy feeding and watching birds in the winter. However, we should be aware that feeders can spread certain avian diseases, and that there are steps we can take to minimize their impact. Salmonellosis, trichomoniasis, avian pox and other diseases are minimized by taking some easy steps at your feeders:



*American Goldfinch, by
 Dave Kiehm.*

- Give birds space. Lots of birds at a single feeder look wonderful, but crowding spreads disease. Jostling for space also can lead to stress, making birds more vulnerable to disease.
- Clean up waste under your feeders and clean your feeders regularly. I try to use a 10% bleach solution once or twice a month, then let the feeders air dry.
- Use good quality food. Supermarket blends are of little value and seem to get moldy quickly. Discard any food that looks wet or has been left uneaten by the birds.
- Make feeders safe. Eliminate sharp edges and corners. Even small cuts can be a portal for infection. Do whatever is necessary to keep cats permanently away from your feeders.
- Help your neighbors who feed birds do a better job. Birds do not stay at just one feeder and are likely to spread diseases from feeder to feeder.

Just because bird feeding isn't problem-free doesn't mean it should be stopped. What is called for is ethical bird feeding so as not to endanger wild birds. It will always remain for many of us an activity to help bring nature to us on days we need it most.

Bob Donnelly

FAVORITE PLACES SERIES: BASSWOOD POND STATE FOREST

This popular state forest in the Town of Burlington has multiple attractions. There is a picnic area, a large pond with trout, 2 beaver ponds, and an extensive network of hiking and ski trails on both sides of Jacobs Road. The trails lead to various brush and woodland habitats where a wide variety of species can be found. The trails on the south side are more level than the north.

Woodland warblers frequent these areas including blackburnian, nashville, black-throated blue and green, and mourning. Barred Owls and Common Ravens are present all year. During invasion years, the extensive conifer plantations attract crossbills and other finches. There is an isolated beaver pond on the trail leading south of the man-made Basswood Pond. Its edge of emergent vegetation provides shelter for breeding Wood Ducks, Virginia Rails, and Swamp Sparrows. During migration, Olive-sided Flycatchers can be seen along the

pond's edge. Hooded Mergansers and other fish eating birds are often found at this beaver pond.

The trails on the north side of Jacobs lead to dry high elevation woodlands. Skiing the steep trails on the north side requires a high skill level and skiers are advised to travel in a clockwise direction.

Tom Salo

Editor's Note: Directions from the DEC website <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/50729.html>: From points East: Take St. Hwy. 80 West of Cooperstown. In Burlington, make a right onto County Route 16. Approx. 1 1/2 miles, make a left onto Basswood Road. Make first right on the State Forest Truck Trail and proceed to day use area.

For GPS users:

Lat: 42.7548000000 - Long: -75.1121000000.

DOAS EAGLE TRIP

Eighteen participants disregarded a forecast bitterly cold day on January 9th for the DOAS field trip to view wintering eagles in Delaware County.

The weather turned out to be not so bad, with abundant sunshine and light winds. The eagles were only



Trip participants view an eagle and nest near Deposit.

moderately cooperative: nine birds were spotted along the East and West Branches of the Delaware River and Cannonsville Reservoir. This was a lower count than in recent years, and may be related to the fact that the trip was on an earlier date than usual.

What lacked in quantity was made up in quality. A lovely adult eagle perched quite cooperatively alongside a nest above the village of Deposit. It eventually headed downriver in dramatic flight. Another great sight was two immature eagles scrapping over a fish that one had captured. This battle continued for several minutes at close range.

The trip concluded with a congenial lunch and bird talk in Downsville.

Andy Mason

WINTER FIELD TRIP

On Saturday, February 27, the DOAS will lead a field trip looking for Short-eared Owls. Besides the Owls, we will search for Snow Buntings, Horned Larks, and other winter birds. There are numerous owls around this winter. We will meet and leave from the Cooperative Extension Building, on Lake Street at the edge of Cooperstown, at 3:00PM. For those who are interested, we will also search after dark for other owls in the area. Dress appropriately for the weather. Although there will be minimal walking, it can be windy. Any questions call Bob Donnelly at 607-264-8156.

Please Note: DOAS field trips are open to the public. Participants should meet at the stated time and location -- please be prompt. We encourage carpooling: please help with expenses if you are in someone else's vehicle. Most trips include a moderate amount of easy walking; leaders will note any strenuous hiking. Please expect to provide your own food and drink unless a food stop is indicated. In case of bad weather, check with the leader about cancellation.

DOAS Christmas Bird Count Summary							
41 Years 1969 - 2009							
J. Robert Miller							
Species	2009	No. of Years	High # Birds (Yr.)	Species	2009	No. of Years	High # Birds (Yr.)
Snow Goose		1	125 (06)	American Crow	772	41	1040 (08)
Common Loon		2	1 (73, 79)	Common Raven	6	6	31 (07)
Double-crested Cormorant		1	1 (06)	Black-capped Chickadee	790	41	799 (07)
Tundra Swan		1	1 (99)	Boreal Chickadee		1	3 (75)
Great Blue Heron		19	4 (91)	Tufted Titmouse	93	33	93 (09)
Canada Goose	703	22	1548 (08)	Red-breasted Nuthatch	23	41	40 (93)
Green-winged Teal		1	1 (82)	White-breasted Nuthatch	70	41	91 (07)
American Black Duck	2	25	44 (95)	Brown Creeper		33	9 (99)
Mallard	73	31	238 (07)	Carolina Wren	1	15	4 (06)
Canvasback		2	13 (01)	Golden-crowned Kinglet		24	20 (82)
Ring-necked Duck		1	12 (99)	Ruby-crowned Kinglet		2	4 (99)
Bufflehead		2	3 (88)	Eastern Bluebird		4	35 (07)
Common Merganser	13	20	81 (06)	Swainson's Thrush		1	1 (71)
Hooded Merganser		3	7 (06)	Hermit Thrush		1	1 (07)
Osprey		2	1 (93, 00)	Wood Thrush		1	1 (71)
Golden Eagle		3	2 (04)	Varied Thrush		2	1 (71, 83)
Bald Eagle	3	6	3 (09)	American Robin		16	16 (07)
Northern Harrier	1	9	1 (73, 80, 83, 94, 98, 00, 07, 09)	Gray Catbird		2	1 (72, 07)
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	17	2 (81, 90, 98, 05, 08)	Northern Mockingbird		8	2 (81)
Cooper's Hawk	5	16	5 (09)	Cedar Waxwing	11	23	42 (07)
Northern Goshawk	1	12	2 (87)	Northern Shrike	1	20	5 (95)
Red-shouldered Hawk		4	1 (74, 99, 03, 04)	European Starling	1227	40	2741 (00)
Red-tailed Hawk	46	41	46 (09)	Yellow-rumped Warbler		1	1 (75)
Rough-legged Hawk	2	35	10 (74)	Northern Cardinal	51	40	76 (76)
American Kestrel		30	10 (73)	Rose-breasted Grosbeak		1	6 (79)
Merlin		1	1 (00)	Eastern Towhee		3	2 (80)
Ring-necked Pheasant		17	3 (71, 84, 86, 00)	American Tree Sparrow	60	41	269 (71)
Ruffed Grouse	8	32	24 (82)	Chipping Sparrow		1	8 (83)
American Coot	1	1	1 (09)	Field Sparrow		1	2 (77)
Wild Turkey	381	29	1225 (95)	Savannah Sparrow		1	1 (71)
Northern Bobwhite		2	5 (75)	Fox Sparrow		1	1 (97)
Killdeer		2	1 (79, 85)	Song Sparrow	1	29	41 (75)
Ring-billed Gull	1	19	206 (01)	Swamp Sparrow		1	6 (75)
Herring Gull		3	9 (92)	White-throated Sparrow	2	25	39 (72)
Rock Pigeon	496	34	1517 (98)	White-crowned Sparrow		6	3 (69)
Mourning Dove	311	39	409 (98)	Dark-eyed Junco	193	41	1051 (71)
Common Barn Owl		1	1 (71)	Snow Bunting	222	17	500 (76)
Eastern Screech Owl	3	10	6 (03)	Red-winged Blackbird	1	13	25 (07)
Great-horned Owl	4	28	5 (04, 07)	Rusty Blackbird		1	2 (74)
Barred Owl	2	9	2 (07, 09)	Common Grackle		9	65 (71)
N. Saw-whet Owl		2	2 (04, 07)	Brown-headed Cowbird		22	200 (84)
Short-eared Owl		1	1 (08)	Bullock's Oriole		1	1 (70)
Belted Kingfisher	1	25	5 (99)	Pine Grosbeak		15	80 (72)
Red-headed Woodpecker		3	1 (80, 82, 99)	Purple Finch	11	33	102 (82)
Red-bellied Woodpecker	4	6	4 (09)	House Finch	54	34	452 (86)
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker		5	3 (93, 97)	Red Crossbill		4	20 (86)
Downy Woodpecker	71	41	85 (08)	White-winged Crossbill		2	3 (85)
Hairy Woodpecker	42	41	59 (71)	Common Redpoll		23	101 (99)
Northern Flicker	2	10	2 (69, 00, 03, 05, 06, 09)	Pine Siskin		23	149 (08)
Pileated Woodpecker	1	25	9 (08)	American Goldfinch	142	41	418 (08)
Horned Lark		5	25 (72)	Evening Grosbeak		32	696 (86)
Blue Jay	487	41	500 (72)	House Sparrow	120	41	947 (74)

(Burlington Wetland Plant Survey, continued from Page 1)

with drier “uplands” only a few feet higher; it is nesting habitat for Canada warblers, northern waterthrush, wood ducks and other wetland birds, and hosts a thriving beaver population. The plant survey began with a visit on 6/15/08 by two experienced local botanists (Connie Tedesco and Jeane Bennett O’Dea) plus Tom Salo and myself; I returned alone on 7/15/08, 5/6/09 and 6/13/09, the total survey time approximating 15 hours. The difficult terrain made straight-line transects impractical, and the survey became a simpler effort to sample all the topographically distinct plant communities of the property.

Four such community types were recognized : 1) swamp forest proper, well stocked with overstory trees but allowing considerable light to reach the wet forest floor and the sphagnum-covered hummocks, logs and “tip-up” root masses that dotted it; 2) drier and more deeply shaded “uplands”, discontinuously interrupting the swamp forest; 3) better-lit forest edges near beaver ponds occupying former channel of Wharton Creek; and 4) the more disturbed, forest on “Black Maple Peninsula”, a slightly elevated southeastern extension of DOAS land that extends to the existing channel of Wharton Creek.

The trees of the swamp forest are primarily hemlock and yellow birch of moderate size, with a lesser component of ash (probably black ash) and a few white pines. Understory trees and

shrubs are scarce except for saplings of buckthorn, but there is abundant growth of herbs, ferns and mosses, especially sphagnum and cinnamon fern; also prominent are other ferns, horsetails, and flowering herbs: skunk cabbage, swamp saxifrage, etc. The elevated microhabitats represented by sphagnum-covered tree bases, logs and root tip-ups bear a semi-distinct sub-community of herbs, including goldthread, Canada mayflower, bellwort and foam-flower.

The “uplands” interrupting the swamp matrix are dominated by large hemlock and yellow birch, here up to 9+ feet and 4-5 feet, respectively, in circumference. There are few shrubs, and only a sparse (but species-rich) herb layer of spring flowers, notably starflower, wood sorrel, bunchberry, and (rarely) Clintonia, pink lady’s slipper, painted trillium and purple trillium.

The beaver ponds lie along the east side of the property, and the better-lit strands along their edge merge into the upland forest areas. These strands harbor species not noticed elsewhere, including blue flag iris, pipsissewa, moneywort, fringed sedge and maidenhair fern among the smaller plants, and musclewood (American hornbeam) and red maple among the trees. Hemlock remains the dominant tree here, but most of the hemlocks in the strand area, as well as most of the musclewood, have been damaged by beavers.

The beaver strand merges southward into the higher ground of Black Maple Peninsula. Here the woody plants include hawthorn, black maple, ironwood (hop hornbeam), butternut, and nannyberry (black maple - closely related to sugar maple - is a species more typical of the Midwest and is not known elsewhere in Otsego County). The trees of the peninsula form a sparse canopy, beneath which a rank herbaceous layer is dominated by false hellebore and, closer to the creek, ostrich fern. Garlic mustard, common milkweed and goldenrod also are present in this knee-to thigh-high tangle that is dense enough (I found) to conceal a fawn until it is almost underfoot. Where Black Maple Peninsula abuts the beaver strand the herb layer is sparser, allowing small herbaceous species such as wild geranium, cut-leaved toothwort, and spring beauty to flourish. Here too are different tree species: basswood, beech, sugar maple and red maple.

Adventurous souls wishing to visit this DOAS property should do so with an experienced guide such as Tom Salo or myself - the swamp forest is treacherous to navigate and easy to get lost in. A more complete listing of the plants encountered in this survey will be in DOAS files and on the website. Identifications are not always ironclad - and I did not even try to identify the grasses and sedges!

Joe Richardson

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.

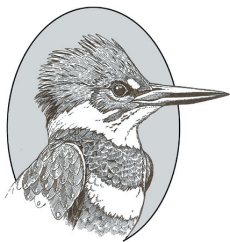
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*American Coot, a first-time species for the DOAS
Christmas Bird Count! See page 3 for details.*

Photo by Dave Kiehm.

DECEMBER-JANUARY BIRD SIGHTINGS

Winter has finally made its arrival with blasts of frigid air. Because of frequent blustery gusts of wind, birds have been clinging to the cage of my suet feeder and have been finding a safe haven on the ledges of my bird feeder. I'm amazed at the resiliency of these winter birds.

Randy and Carol Lynch spied their first of the year American Tree Sparrow in N. Harpersfield on 12/1. A Belted Kingfisher was still braving the cold in Treadwell according to Dorian Huneke (12/2). Charlie Scheim saw a flock of sixteen Common Ravens swooping and soaring over Oyaron Hill at Hartwick College (12/3). On 12/5 Warren Ryther and his wife saw two Snow Buntings camouflaged in light snow in Garrettsville, Jo Ann Salo viewed a flapping and gliding Golden Eagle in W. Burlington, and Randy and Carol Lynch watched a Brown Creeper make its way up the bark of a tree in Jefferson. Warren Ryther also had his first of the year American Tree Sparrow in Garrettsville (12/7). On 12/11 four Brown-headed Cowbirds visited John Davis' feeder in Cooperstown. December 12th was a big Snow Geese birding day. Tom Salo saw 5000 of them passing over his house throughout the day in Burlington, Dorian Huneke saw seven in Treadwell, and Jeff Murray picked out six

Snow Geese scattered among a huge flock of Canada Geese. Fifteen Snow Buntings soared past Andy Mason in Jefferson (12/14). On 12/20 Becky Gretton saw a Northern Shrike in Middlefield and Jessie Ravage saw a Common Raven in Cooperstown. Randy Lynch had a Rough-legged Hawk fly over his house in N. Harpersfield for the first time ever on 12/24. A Northern Shrike chasing Blue Jays and a Mourning Dove was seen by Tom Salo in W. Burlington (12/25).

On 1/7/10 Tom Salo observed a flock of more than seventy Snow Buntings in Westford and a Northern Shrike in Middlefield. Sue Whitney also saw about forty Snow Buntings in Bloomville two days later. The next day Bob Howard reported the sighting of a Golden Eagle in Sidney. On 1/12 Kay Crane had two Carolina Wrens at her feeder in Walton and Greg Kunkel watched as a Hairy Woodpecker poked sunflower seeds into Sapsucker holes of one of his birch trees in Andes.

If you have bird sightings to report, please contact me dbenko@frontiernet.net, 6815 Co. Hwy. 16, Delhi, NY 13753, 607 829-5218 by February 14, 2010 for the next issue of *The Belted Kingfisher*.

Dianne Benko