



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society, Inc.
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Volume 40, No. 1 Jan. 2008

Editor — Bob Miller

COMING ACTIVITIES

- Jan. 12 Eagle Trip with Andy Mason. Page 5.
Jan. 13 Annual January NYSOA Waterfowl Count. Andy Mason in charge. Page 5.
Jan. 15 Board Meeting. Joe Richardson's home.
Jan. 18 DOAS General Meeting. Nigel and Kim Mann present *Rainforest Conservation. Applying New Strategies*. See below.
Feb. 15 DOAS General Meeting. *N. Y. State Breeding Bird Atlas: 20 Yearws of Change*
Kimberley Corwin
Feb. 23 Short-eared Owl Trip. Bob Donnelly leader.
Mar. 21 DOAS General Meeting. *All About Bluebirds, and More* — John Rogers
Apr. 18 DOAS General Meeting. *Important Bird Areas: Priority Birds and Conservation* — Jilian Liner of Audubon NY.
May 16 DOAS General Meeting. *Promoting Healthy Backyard Habitats*. Pam Musk
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Program Presentation on Friday, January 18, 2008

Rain Forest Conservation: applying new strategies will be the topic of the next general meeting, Friday, January 18, 2008, 7:30p.m. in the Elm Park Methodist Church, Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

Dr. Nigel Mann, Professor of Biology, and his wife Kim Dingess Mann, Biological Anthropologist, both of the State University of New York at Oneonta will discuss their project DANTA, an Organization for the Conservation of the Tropics. The mission of DANTA is to promote an understanding of the complexity and vulnerability of the very important tropical ecosystem. This husband and wife team continues their important research in areas such as songbird functions, primate communications, and conservation.

Refreshments are served. For further information please contact Eleanor Moriarty, 607-278-5896.

President's Column

Dynamic Birds

As I write this in early December, a major irruption of boreal finches appears to be underway. Recent large crops of conifer seeds in the north have resulted in good reproductive success over the past two years. Populations of these northern, seed eating birds are high. However, this year the northern cone crop is poor. Pine Siskins, Common Redpolls, Evening Grosbeaks and Pine Grosbeaks are appearing locally. There have also been scattered reports of crossbills. Bohemian Waxwings are being found in northern NY. This is a good year to watch the feeders for uncommon visitors from the north.

While on the subject of uncommon birds, Golden Eagle numbers at Franklin Mountain have been lower than expected so far this season. They are also low at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch in PA., but not as low at here. There is an association between Franklin Mountain and Allegheny Front. When we have a big golden day, they often have a similar event 3 days later. Counters have been speculating on whether the birds have taken alternative routes this season or if they have delayed their migration because of the extended warm fall. Last winter - when it was exceptionally warm - goldens were found across the Appalachian Plateau well into mid-winter.

Last winter Short-eared Owls showed up late locally. Their distribution was patchy and numbers were small. This year, Short-eared Owl reports started appearing north of US 20 in late November. If the snow isn't too deep and the birds persist, Bob Donnelly's February 23 owl trip should once again be successful.

As these events show, bird populations, migratory behavior and ranges are all dynamic. For those of us who care to understand the long term impacts of wind turbines, these year-to-year differences make a strong statement in favor of multi-year bird surveys before approving a project for construction.

Weather and food availability certainly affect bird distribution. However, some birds just seem to change their habits. Merlins - formerly a bird of the wild north - have adapted well to human environments and are successfully breeding in cities in New York. Any wildlife species that wants to be successful should follow their lead. Changes in breeding distribution - such as that of Merlins - have been documented in the new New York State Breeding Bird Atlas. If you are interested in how species' ranges have changed over a twenty year period, come hear Atlas Project Coordinator and Co-Editor Kim Corwin when she discusses the upcoming publication on February 21. I hope to see you there.

... Tom Salo

ON FEEDING BIRDS -AND BEARS

Last May I had the unexpected visit to my bird feeding area of a hungry Black Bear. Fine and good, except that a demolished bird feeder was the result! How bears can sniff out those sunflower seeds and differentiate them from the seeds of the natural environment is beyond me -but it clearly happens! After posting the event on Osbirds (osbirds@yahoo.com), I received the stern advice of Kevin Berner, Associate Professor of Wildlife Biology at State University of New York at Cobleskill, to stop feeding birds for the summer and fall, until bears have dened for the winter. Anyway, after waiting all summer with no local bear reports, I defied his instructions and put up feeders again. Well, you can guess the result: another two feeders ripped down, one destroyed... . Others provided various advice, the best, as far as I could figure, was to take down the feeders every night. Still, Kevin -and the DEC at Stamford- said I shouldn't feed until winter, period. As Kevin and the DEC point out, a nuisance bear all too often becomes a dead bear. (Do the birds really need us to feed them in the summer and fall? Clearly no, but it's just plain fun and educational to feed those winged critters!) Finally, after reading those reports on Osbirds of all those interesting species -from northern shrikes to redpolls- I couldn't stand it any more and began feeding again on December 1st -staggering out each morning to put my feeders up and putting them away before dark. The birds are coming back, and as I watched a Red-breasted Nuthatch from 5 feet away, a Sharp-shinned Hawk suddenly zigzagged by between me and the feeders. Thank goodness it's now winter, and such concerns about feeding birds can at least be put off until next spring!

... John Davis



Photographer Unknown

Conservation and Legislation

by Andy Mason

Support growing for legislation to halt aerial hunting of Alaskan wolves--The practice of using airplanes to track and kill wolves in the wilderness of Alaska is one of the most egregious acts against America's wildlife. In this aerial gunning 'sport', pilots and hunters scan the landscape for wolves or wolf tracks then locate the wolves in an open area such as a frozen lake. By law, the hunter must land in order to shoot the wolf, but evidence indicates this is widely ignored, animals are targeted from the air.

Alaska's wolves have long been persecuted. Before Alaska gained statehood, the U.S. Government killed hundreds of wolves each year -- entire packs were shot from airplanes and poisoned throughout the state. Large numbers of wolves were also killed for bounties offered by the government.

These activities were termed 'predator control' and justified as necessary to keep high populations of caribou, moose and other large game available for hunters. This remains the rationale today.

Numerous scientific studies, including findings by the National Academy of Sciences have shown that wolves are not a threat to populations of their prey.

There is widespread opposition to aerial wolf hunting even among Alaskans. They have voted twice to ban aerial control of wolves, however, the Alaskan legislature and Governor continue to reinstate this misguided policy.

In response to the continuing disregard for science and public opinion shown by the Alaskan politicians, legislation has been introduced in Congress to clarify a long-standing federal law against aerial wolf hunting. The Protect America's Wildlife (PAW) Act currently has nearly 50 sponsors, but needs more support to reach the floor of the House of Representatives.

Wolves are an integral and important part of our nation's wildlife heritage and their ecosystems, and they deserve full protection

What you can do--Write your US Representative and ask them to cosponsor the PAW Act (HR 3663). Emphasize that this hunting is neither scientifically valid nor sporting. The nation has spent millions of dollars in restoring wolves in the lower 48 states, and they deserve the same attention and protection in Alaska.

Membership Information

Please note the expiration date on your mailing label: the first two numbers indicate the year your membership expires, and the second two numbers indicate the month. For example, '0806' indicates June, 2008.

Your last issue of The Belted Kingfisher will be stamped as such. This is the only renewal notice, so please check your label. We value your membership!

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fax: (202) 225-1891
www.arcuri.house.gov

Board Meeting Highlights

Here are some highlights from the DOAS Board meeting of December 4th. The full, approved minutes are available upon request from John Davis.

- The Treasurer's Report indicated a favorable income/expense balance, and the proposed 2008 budget was adjusted and approved to cover some anticipated increased expenses.
- The Charter dinner at The Sunset Restaurant was a great success and plans are underway for next year's event.
- Conservation Chair Andy Mason has sent comments to developers, the DEC and town officials that we consider that avian-impact studies done prior to a proposed Delaware County wind farm were inadequate.
- The Audubon Adventures program sponsored by DOAS now has decreased interest by area schools, and new approaches are being looked into. Educational grants offered to schools by DOAS will be advertised soon.
- Exciting programs for our general meetings are planned through the spring of 2008.
- Gifts for our veteran hawk watchers are planned in lieu of a Hawk-Watch Dinner this season.
- Our campaign for money to support a telemetry device for a Golden Eagle as part of the National Aviary study is nearing its goal; a report will appear in the Kingfisher.
- DOAS local memberships are increasing over a year ago. (Please enlist more new members!)
- Eleanor Moriarty reported on the fall Audubon Council meeting at Montezuma; the new Executive Director of Audubon NY is Al Caccese, replacing David Miller. DOAS is a recognized and appreciated chapter! ...John Davis

NYS Youth Birding Group Formed

So, when you looked around at the folks at the last meeting or field trip, did you think they looked a bit grayer or had, perhaps, a few more wrinkles? And did that make you begin to wonder about where the young birders are--those young people who will be the future 'ace' birders of the state?

Well, the board of the New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA)--the organization that represents 46 New York bird clubs with a combined membership of more than 20,000--has thought about that, too. NYSOA already has in place the Lillian Stoner award, a scholarship to attend the NYSOA annual meeting for young birders over the age of 18, and has discussed different ideas to encourage and support the development of young birders. So when Hope Batcheller, a 15 year-old young woman from Petersburg, N.Y., came to the NYSOA board asking for support in forming a New York State Young Birders Club (henceforth Young Birders Club or NYSYBC), it jumped at the chance to do so.

Hope had started an online Yahoo! group for young New York birders last November (NYSyoungbirders listserv: www.groups.yahoo.com/group/nysyoungbirders), a virtual place where young birders could meet, talk about birds, post their sightings, raise identification questions and the like. She also had an idea to eventually turn this into an organization along the lines of the Ohio Young Birders Club (OYBC: www.ohioyoungbirders.org) started in May 2006 and coordinated by Kim Kaufman of Ohio's Black Swamp Bird Observatory (she's also Kenn Kaufman's wife). As Hope told us "OYBC is geared for kids 12-18; it offers field trips, a newsletter, an annual conference and scholarships for camps and events, all based on input from young birders. But I think it would be best to start small, with a few field trips and a newsletter by young birders with articles, photographs, artwork and a list of events of interest."

Hope brought her ideas to the NYSOA board's November meeting and the board agreed to sponsor formation of the NYSYBC. NYSOA will provide the initial financial assistance Hope requested, publicity, space on the NYSOA website or server, and adult support. Thus, this article...

Adult support is critical to successful formation of the Young Birders Club. Governance for the organization will be provided by the group's own youth officers, overseen by an adult coordinator and the NYSOA board. The advisory structure for the Youth Birders Club is envisioned to consist of the adult coordinator, a youth advisory board and an adult planning committee.

First and foremost, NYSOA/NYSYBC needs a volunteer for the overall adult coordinator. With the help of the adult planning committee, this volunteer will participate with, guide and oversee the group's youth advisory board and officers and members in the planning

and implementation of the group's operations, including: trips and events, publications and website and logistics such as insurance, safety and finances. The adult coordinator will also report on the club's progress to the NYSOA board at its regular meetings. Please contact NYSOA president Bill Ostrander (browncreeper@stny.rr.com) or any other NYSOA board member (contact information at www.nybirds.org) if you're interested.

Hope's vision is a great idea and worthy of a lot of support from NYSOA...it may be as important to birding in New York State as habitat conservation and species preservation. Please join the NYSOA board in bringing her vision to reality.

--Bob Mauceli, Rochester Birding Assoc.

September-October Bird Sightings

The days are quickly getting shorter and darker. The cold, snowy weather is fast approaching, bringing with it some "wintery" birds that haven't been seen in a long time while some summer visitors still linger on.

On 10/19 I saw a Carolina wren outside my kitchen window in Treadwell. On 10/22 Andy Mason reported 4 pine siskins in Jefferson, Tom Salo had common ravens, a sharp-shinned hawk, 2 field sparrows and white-crowned and white-throated sparrows in W. Burlington and John Davis saw a pine siskin in Cooperstown. Andy Mason also reported an Eastern phoebe in Jefferson on 10/24. The next day he also saw a sharp-shinned hawk in Oneonta. Dorian Huneke had a common yellowthroat in Treadwell and Tom Salo reported an Eastern towhee in W. Burlington on 10/27. He also sighted 2 immature golden eagles in W. Burlington the next day.

The month of November brought many bird sightings. On 11/1 John Davis reported a fox sparrow in Cooperstown. On 11/3 Gerianne Carillo had a common redpoll in Milford, Terri Wetzel reported 6 evening grosbeaks in Morris, Tom Salo saw a dark rough-legged hawk and a Northern harrier in W. Burlington and Cindy Bauer reported an immature golden eagle in South Valley. A Northern shrike was seen by Bob Donnelly in Edmeston on 11/4. On 11/8 Andy Mason saw an American tree sparrow in Jefferson. The next day Warren Ryther reported a pileated woodpecker in Garrattsville and Pete Fauth saw a red-bellied woodpecker in Oneonta. A red-bellied woodpecker was also seen by Tom & Sue Whitney in Delhi on 11/10. On 11/11 Fred Reckner reported a Northern shrike in Downsville. On 11/17 Dorian Huneke had 2 tufted titmice at her feeder in Treadwell. On 11/18 Tom Salo reported 20 snow geese, 2 great blue herons and a flock of fifty wild turkeys in W. Burlington while Jo Ann Salo saw a great horned owl. Andy Mason saw an American kestrel in Stamford on 11/27. The last day of the month Cynthia Waterman reported a Northern shrike in Delhi.

Please send sightings to Dianne Benko; 607 829-5218; 6815 Co. Hwy 16, Delhi, NY 13753; cagcd@wpc.com by 1/13/08 for the next issue of The Belted Kingfisher.

Former NAS President Peter Berle 1937-2007

Peter Berle, who served as President of the National Audubon Society for ten years starting in 1985, died on Nov. 1, 2007 as a result of injuries suffered in an accident on his farm in western Massachusetts.

Peter Berle had a long and productive career as a conservationist and environmentalist. In the 1970s, he was elected to the NY State Assembly from Manhattan. In 1976, Gov. Hugh Carey appointed him Commissioner of the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation. As DEC Commissioner Peter was a strong advocate for the environment, often taking stances at odds with the Albany political establishment. He was involved in the first legal actions regarding toxic waste chemical dumping at Love Canal in western NY, and took a stand against the General Electric Co.'s pollution of the Hudson River with PCBs. He had a particular interest in the Adirondacks, and oversaw the state's purchase of 9000 acres, including 11 of the highest Adirondack peaks.

As NAS President, he emphasized activism within the organization. He was an advocate and supporter of Chapters, and it was after his departure that National Audubon began its policy of defunding Chapters of membership dollars.

I was fortunate to meet with Peter Berle several times during his Audubon tenure, including a visit to Oneonta in 1987 when he spoke at DOAS' Charter Dinner and helped establish an acid rain monitoring station at the Sanctuary. He leaves behind the legacy of a lifetime of worthy protection of our natural environment.

--Andy Mason

Waterfowl Count

The NY State Ornithological Association's annual statewide waterfowl count is scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 13, 2008. DOAS covers Otsego Lake and the Susquehanna River above Unadilla, the Unadilla River, and Cannonsville Reservoir and the W. Branch of the Delaware River.

Anyone interested in helping with this census, please contact Andy Mason, (607) 652-2162, AndyMason@earthling.net.

Eagle Trip Scheduled for January 12

Jan. 12, 2008 is the date for the annual DOAS field trip to view wintering Bald Eagles. The trip visits rivers and reservoirs in Delaware and/or Sullivan Counties where the birds concentrate to feed. Our destination will be determined by reports and scouting prior to the trip.

Other raptors and waterfowl are usually sighted on this trip. We also will stop at a local restaurant for lunch for interested participants.

The trip will leave the Dietz St. parking lot across from the YMCA in Oneonta at 8 a.m. Carpooling is encouraged and participants can be picked up en route. Return to Oneonta will be mid to late afternoon.

For further information, contact Andy Mason, (607) 652-2162, AndyMason@earthling.net.

DOAS Financial Review

At the end of each year our finance committee reviews our bank statements and financial documentation. Our Treasurer does excellent work so this has been a relatively easy process. Currently, the committee is not fully staffed. We are looking for someone to help with this review this year. We prefer that it not be a Director. Financial expertise is not a requirement. If you would be willing to help DOAS with this small but essential task, please contact me.

... Tom Salo 607-965-8232

Hawkwatch News

This has been an up and down season at the Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch. The total count of hawks is definitely up, as counters have tallied over 6000 birds through early December. This is only the second time in the 19-year history of the hawkwatch that this many raptors have been sighted.

Also on the positive side are new seasonal records for two species Broad-winged Hawks and Sharp-shinned Hawks. Sharp-shin numbers have been on a decades-long downslide, so it is particularly good to see them have a good year.

The marquee species at Franklin Mt. has not lived up to its billing this year. The last few seasons have brought 200+ Golden Eagles past the lookout, but this year looks as if 150 will be a good accomplishment. The biggest one day count is 22 goldens spotted by Steve Hall and Fred Fries on Dec. 1. Things are in full swing as we enter the most exciting part of the season the movement of large numbers of Red-tailed Hawks and our most special species, Golden Eagles.

Counting will continue at Franklin Mt. at least on promising days through New Years Day. A complete seasonal wrapup will appear in the next Kingfisher. Directions and more information on the hawkwatch are available at www.franklinmt.org.

Human Activity - Compromising Our Environment

Some desert clans, indigenous peoples in the Arctic, and hunter gatherers in Africa, New Guinea, and Amazonia live lightly on the land. Then there's the other 6.6 billion of us! We clear forests, farm, and build cities, dams, roads and dramatically alter the landscape. Human activity consumes almost two-thirds of the remaining biological productivity. We leave only one third for all the other species. Overall, nearly 1/4 of Earth's land-based biological productivity ends up in people's hands and bellies.

People farm about 12 % of the land outside of Antarctica and Greenland, and use about 23% for grazing. And 35% of the earth's surface is occupied by natural forests.

If humans were not around to alter the landscape, the world's natural vegetation would absorb enough CO2 from the atmosphere to lock away about 65.5 B metric tons of CO2 each year. With man's alteration (in 2000) the Earth's vegetation locked away only about 59.6 B metric tons, and then human activity removed about 23.8 % from the world's ecosystems. And of course the carbon appropriated by man (food, forage, wood) was not available to other species.

In the stampede to replace fossil fuels, some scientists have proposed large-scale cultivation of crops for biofuels. It would increase the huge life zones devoid of other life - monocultures.

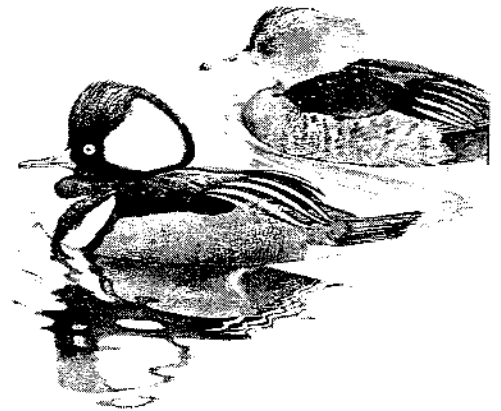
If the whole world begins to look like Iowa cornfields, it will mean ever more land used by man and less for other things, which might just be things that matter to us - things that clean our water, preserve our soils, clean our atmosphere, and pollinate our crops.

Environmental scientist, (U.wisconsin-Madison) Jonathan Foley asks - "at what point does human activity begin to compromise a lot of our environmental systems and at what point does this get to be scary?"

...Jean Miller from *Science News*. vol. 172, pg. 235

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Membership Application

Membership in the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Soc. includes 9 issues of our newsletter, *The Belted Kingfisher*. Cost is \$12 annually or \$20 for 2 years. Please make check payable to DOAS and mail to DOAS Membership Chair, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544, with name, address and phone.

(NOTE: Please mail National Audubon renewals to address on renewal notice.)

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To contribute notes or articles for *The Belted Kingfisher*, please send to: Kingfisher Editor, DOAS, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544.

All meetings are free and open to the public.