

THE BELTED KINGFISHER

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society, Inc.

Founded 1968 P.O. Box 544, Oneonta, N.Y. 13820

Volume 41, No. 1, Jan. 2009

Editor — Bob Miller

COMING ACTIVITIES

- Jan. 16 DOAS General Meeting. *Nature Photography*. Gail and Nelson DuBois, local wildlife photographers, will present recent photographic journeys: *The Panda Bears of China and the Snow Monkeys of Japan*. See below for more information.
- Jan. 17 Eagle Field Trip. Andy Mason leader. Details page 4.
- Jan. 18 Annual NY State Waterfowl Count. Andy Mason. See page 4.
- Feb. 20 DOAS General Meeting. *Marriage, Infidelity and Divorce in Monkeys: The Soap Opera Lives of South American Titi Monkeys* presented by Kim Ding ess, director of DANTA, Association of Conservation of the Tropics.
- Feb. 21 Short-eared Owl Field Trip. Bob Donnelly. Meet at Cooperstown Coop Extension at 3:00 PM. Contact Bob at 607-264-8156.
- Mar.20 DOAS General Meeting. Lauren Hierl who is Alaska Policy Associate of the National Audubon Society presents *Alaska Road Show*.
- Apr. 17 DOAS General Meeting. *Birds of New York State*. Warren Green's bird and nature photography will once again display his incredible photos of our birds.
- May 15 DOAS General Meeting. *White Nose Syndrome: Bats—What it is and Why it is Important to You*. Presented by Emily Davis, an experienced team member of the DEC, studying and collecting data on the crisis in the bat colonies.
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THE PANDA BEARS of CHINA and THE SNOW MONKEYS of JAPAN

is presented by local wildlife photographers Gail and Nelson DuBois.

The meeting place is the Elm Park Methodist Church on Chestnut street in Oneonta at 7:30 PM. The meeting is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served. For more information please contact Eleanor Moriarty, program chair at e-mail eleanor@dmcom.net or home phone 607-278-5896.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Looking Back on the Past Year

During the past year, we experienced a number of changes. Long-time Director and Vice President Cheryl Boise resigned from the board. Dave Kiehm replaced her as a Director. Gray Mason took over the Finance Committee, reviewing all our financial documents once each year.. Andy Mason took on the role of Vice President. Other noteworthy changes included moving the Charter Dinner to October and revising our by-laws.

Our Education committee was quite active. Once again we sponsored the Audubon Adventures educational program, providing these materials to 7 classes. Our educational mini-grant program continues - 3 applications were funded in 2008. We held another successful summer camp at the sanctuary on Franklin Mountain.

Field trips, and bird and flower walks, provided a variety of opportunities for observing wildlife in the field. We even sponsored a youth bird walk this year led by Sandy Bright. Our excellent and diverse programs were well received. The coming year promises more of the same.

We organized numerous bird counts including a a Christmas Bird Count, NYSOA's annual Waterfowl count (the local area), and a "Big Day" count in May. We also encouraged participation in other citizen science projects. Our efforts to assure that wind project developers do adequate research on avian impacts continued. We submitted comments on DEC's draft guidelines for wind projects. We were also involved with projects in Walton, Stamford/Roxbury, and, a revised proposal in Jordanville. On the conservation front, we became involved in the rush to find natural gas. The scale of development and the troubling technology require close watching.

The Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch continued to be a success. It is a great volunteer effort. This year's weather wasn't ideal but the counters remained undaunted. As a offshoot of the hawk watch effort, we continued to move forward with research on Golden Eagle migration routes. We applied for a grant which was not funded. However, we will start doing field surveys late this winter using volunteers. We continue to work closely with our collaborators in PA.

The Belted Kingfisher increased its locally written content. It reaches all of our members. The web site is growing in importance as a means of communication. It now contains a "get involved page", an effort to involve more people. We are a completely volunteer organization. Volunteers provide time and energy for our various projects and successes. Please visit that page and consider volunteering to help with our mission.

We created a new bird checklist which can be found on the web site. Merlins made the list's local breeding column obsolete within weeks of the list's release. They were found engaged in breeding activity for the first time locally in both Cooperstown and Oneonta.

One of our best publicized efforts was the attempt to restore a vandalized Heron Rookery in Hartwick. We built platforms where the nest trees had stood. The herons chose to nest in another area of the pond. The platforms will remain in place to see if the herons use them next season. DOAS participated in the Audubon Council meetings in both spring and fall. I hope to continue our involvement. At our Burlington property, a plant inventory was started. Beaver damage to a rare Black Maple tree prompted us to surround others with wire.

2008 was a successful year for DOAS. The board thanks all the volunteers who participated in our various efforts.

Tom Salo

Birds & Wildlife Need You – Join Audubon's Action Network

Audubon Action Alerts are a quick, easy way to get access to your lawmakers, local media, and inside information on issues impacting birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. If you aren't already a part of our online action network, sign up today at www.audubonaction.org/newyork.

Action Alerts allow you to take action on issues of priority concern, both nationally and locally, by providing you with easy to send letters and automatically matching you to your specific federal and state lawmakers. Action Alerts are sent periodically on issues of national concern (from the grassroots office of the National Audubon Society) and on a statewide or local level (from Audubon New York, working closely with Chapters around the state). Please sign up today - the more people we can reach with this tool, the more successful we will be in our conservation efforts.

If you provide at least your city, state, and zip code when signing up, we will be able to send you alerts and invitations that affect you most directly. Don't worry - we will not inundate your inbox, your information is confidential and will not be used for other purposes, and you can unsubscribe anytime.

We know that lawmakers care about your views and opinions. As a constituent, you have a unique ability to convey your concerns to them. Helping is easy, won't take much time, and most importantly, will go a very long way in protecting our wildlife!

... Bob Miller

Conservation and Legislation

by Andy Mason

Gas drilling controls needed--The untapped natural gas lying in the shale formations deep below central NY is still a source of controversy among regulators, landowners, environmentalists, and energy companies.

A recent hearing on the Dep't. of Environmental Conservation's review of the horizontal hydro-fracturing drilling technique used to reach the gas drew over 300 people in Oneonta. Nearly all had concerns over impacts of gas development on surface and ground water, as well as other issues. DOAS submitted comments asking DEC to also consider impacts on wildlife and habitat. (DOAS comments are available at www.doas.us.)

One point raised repeatedly is the exemption for this drilling from a number of important federal statutes. Among these is the Safe Drinking Water Act that allows the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate underground injection of fluids--part of the hydro-fracturing process. This loophole was put into the Bush administration's infamous Energy Policy Act of 2005. Without this protection, drinking water is at greater risk of contamination from chemicals added to the injected fluids. NY State's regulations largely plug this loophole, but many other states do not. US Rep. Maurice Hinchey has introduced legislation, H.R. 7231, reinstating standards for hydraulic fracturing.

What you can do--Local US Reps. Kirsten Gillibrand and Michael Arcuri have not signed on to support Rep. Hinchey's bill. Contact them and ask for co-sponsorship of H.R. 7231 to protect clean drinking water. Remind them that the concerns of central NYers are those of all citizens. **NY's fiscal crisis helping the environment can save money**--As Gov. David Paterson has made abundantly clear, NY State will suffer greatly from the ongoing economic slowdown.

Paterson intends to slash state spending to close the looming state budget deficit, cuts that will no doubt negatively impact the environment. Already the Environmental Protection Fund--the source of moneys for land acquisition, recycling programs, and many other conservation efforts--is in the governor's sunsights.

However, there are ways to cut state spending and help the environment. Albany's Environmental Advocates (EA) has produced a new report on state spending and natural resources. *Saving Green: Addressing New York's Fiscal Crisis & Protecting the Environment*, identifies almost \$1 billion in spending and revenue to help the budget and benefit the environment in the next five years. Among the potential savings:

Presently, sale of bunker fuel, low quality oil that powers cargo ships, is tax exempt. Burning this fuel releases harmful gases including sulfur and nitrate

compounds--key contributors to smog and linked to health problems such as asthma. Over the last five years, the state has lost \$34.5 million annually by exempting this dirty fuel from taxes.

The Power for Jobs program provides cheap energy to some NY companies to keep jobs in state. But the program isn't working: while the state invests hundreds of millions of dollars to reduce power demand, it's encouraging wasteful energy use. And the power recipients aren't creating jobs--the reason for subsidies.

The state is providing over \$8 million for an experimental "clean coal" power plant in Jamestown while a cleaner natural gas turbine sits idle in the same town. The very concept of "clean coal" technology is questionable and doesn't deserve taxpayer money when a better power source sits unused

Another flawed economic development project is a planned microchip fabrication facility in Marcy, near Utica, that would destroy over 10 acres of wetlands. The project has been denied permits by the US EPA and Fish & Wildlife Service, but received over \$51.5 million in state money before breaking ground, and could cost as much as \$600 million, with no assurance of a tenant. The state should reconsider this boondoggle and change the location to a city center with infrastructure in place rather than on wetlands.

What you can do--Let Gov. Paterson and your legislators know that there are millions to be saved while helping the environment. Urge them to cut out spending on dubious development, and look to green investment in NY's economy.

The entire EA report is available at www.eany.org/issues/reports/SavingGreen_FINAL_lowres.pdf

Addresses

NY State

Gov. David Paterson
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224
(518) 474-8390
fax: (518) 474-1513
www.ny.gov/governor

Albany, NY 12248
Magee--(518) 455-4807
mageew@assembly.state.ny.us
Crouch--(518) 455-5741
crouchc@assembly.state.ny.us
Lopez--(518) 455-5363
lopezp@assembly.state.ny.us

State Senate

State Sens. 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

US Congress

20th Congressional District:
Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 225-5614
www.gillibrand.house.gov

24th Congressional District: Rep.
Michael Arcuri
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 225-3665
fax: (202) 225-1891
www.arcuri.house.gov

State Assembly

Assemblymembers William
Magee/Clifford Crouch/Peter
Lopez
NY State Assembly

Hawkwatch News

The 2008 season is winding down at the Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch, and preliminary numbers indicate below average counts for most species, and for total raptors. A week into December, Red-tailed Hawks the most numerous bird at the hawkwatch--are well below the 7 year average since full-time counting began. In addition, Golden Eagles will be significantly down for the second year in a row. Only Turkey Vultures and Broad-winged Hawks appear likely to have above average counts. A full report with seasonal totals will appear in next month's Kingfisher.

Eagle Trip Scheduled for January 17

Keep in mind Sat., Jan. 17--the date for the annual DOAS field trip to view wintering Bald Eagles. The trip visits rivers and reservoirs in Delaware County where the birds concentrate to feed. Recent trips have turned up 20+ eagles.

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 strongly encouraged; participants can be picked up en route in Delhi and Walton. Return to Oneonta will be mid to late afternoon. Walkie-talkies are useful for communications between cars.

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

Waterfowl Count

The NY State Ornithological Association's annual statewide waterfowl count is scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 18. 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.

October-December Bird Sightings

We're still seeing some brave birds in our area persistently hanging around before the heavy snows and the biting cold arrive. They're trying to compete with our great array of diehard winter species.

On 10/21 John Davis reported 2 fox sparrows in Cooperstown. Tom Salo saw a chipping sparrow and a gray catbird in W. Burlington on 10/27. On 10/29 Dave

Kiehm reported a peregrine falcon in Oneonta and Tom Salo saw a few Eastern bluebirds in W. Burlington. Gladys Rayher had a Carolina wren in Oneonta on 10/31.

On 11/1 Warren Ryther reported a Cooper's hawk plucking a grouse before eating it in New Lisbon. Tom Salo on 11/11 reported 70 buffleheads, 2 common loons and 8 American coots on Canadarago Lake. Gerry Cahill saw a bald eagle perched at close range in Bloomville on 11/12. Andy Mason reported an American woodcock in Jefferson on 11/14. He also saw 20 white-winged crossbills at the FMHW on 11/17. I saw a belted kingfisher perched on a telephone wire fishing over a pond in Treadwell on 11/18. John Davis reported an American tree sparrow in Cooperstown on 11/19. On 11/10 Andy Mason saw a light phase rough-legged hawk in Jefferson and Eleanor Moriarty saw a great blue heron and a belted kingfisher on Charlotte Creek. Warren Ryther saw a Northern shrike in Garrattsville on 11/22. On 11/23 Tom Salo reported a short-eared owl in W. Burlington and Andy Mason saw a Lincoln's sparrow at the FMHW. Lisa Gorn had a Carolina wren in Morris on 11/16.

Please send sightings to Dianne Benko; 607 829-5218; 6815 Co. Hwy. 16, Delhi, NY 13753; dbenko@frontiernet.net; by January 18, 2009, for the February issue of The Belted Kingfisher.

Dues Increase

At its October 21 meeting, the DOAS Board of Directors voted to increase local membership dues to \$15 for one year and \$25 for two years, effective January 1, 2009.

This largely reflects increased costs for printing and mailing the newsletter, but also general rising expenses for insurance, maintaining the sanctuary, education and conservation programs and other activities of the organization.

The dues increase is the first since our Chapter instituted a separate local membership 6 years ago. At that time we asked members to consider taking a local membership to replace revenue lost when the National Audubon Society ended membership dues sharing with local Chapters. Many DOAS members have taken out local memberships, and we encourage all to do so.

Memberships and renewals received before February 1 will be honored at the present rate of \$12 for one year and \$20 for two years. If you renew by Feb. 1, the additional years will be added to your membership. Your current expiration date is on the mailing label of the newsletter--the first two digits indicate the year and the second two digits indicate the month, i.e., '0906' is June, 2009.

The DOAS board appreciates the ongoing support of our membership.

SOME TIPS ON CHOOSING BINOCULARS

People often ask me what sort of binoculars to buy for birding. The short answer is "the best binoculars in the world are useless if you don't have them with you"! But beyond this reminder, here are a few pointers.

What type do you want? Perhaps the first question is "Porro" or "Roof" design. Porro is the older-fashion "dog-leg" shape, with the newer Roof design having a straight profile. Explaining the difference, in terms of optical design and optical superiority is too complex for this article, except to say that the Porro type may be a surer quality bet for a given price range.

Other considerations include: 1) Weight: for most of us, the smaller we are and older we get, the more difficult it is to hold the binoculars steady. 2) Magnifying Power is indicated by the first number of, say, 8x20 or 10x50. 3) Light Gathering Capacity is related to the size in millimeters of the front lens, e.g. 7x35 or 9x50. 4) Field of view is signified by 405 feet/1000 yards. The wider the number, the easier to find the bird, at both close or distant range. 5) Close-up Focus: Most of us want to be able to see a bird clearly at 7-8 feet. 6) Other Factors to consider: Is the view clear to the edges of the field? Can eye glasses be kept on? Are the binoculars truly weatherproof?

True "pocket binoculars" have one major advantage, providing you remember to put them in your pocket! You do have to be careful, in terms of image quality, field of view and light transmission. For field trips, or by the window looking to your feeder area, you need something a bit bigger, such as 7x35. If you scan the skies for raptors, 10x50 will have an advantage.

How much do you want to pay? The price range for "satisfactory" binoculars could be as low as about \$60. Or you can get the best possible binocs for as high as \$2000 or more! In our present economy, there's one silver lining: there are plenty of sales out there. And occasionally you might just find a bargain; e.g. see the December 2008 issue of Consumer Reports for a binocular "best buy" for under \$60.

Where should you buy your binoculars? There is an advantage to trying them out on the spot, hopefully with a reasonably knowledgeable salesperson to assist. The key is to walk around the store trying them at distant and close ranges and peering into variably lighted crannies. Ordering by mail is also a reasonable way to go. Eagle Optics in

Wisconsin is a favorite of mine (800-289-1132, www.eagleoptics.com); they have a huge selection, a knowledgeable staff and cheerfully exchange or replace.

For more guidelines, Bird Watchers Digest has periodic, in-depth reviews, as do other birding journals. The following web sites are also helpful:

www.birdwatching.com/optics/binocular_advisor.html
www.birdwatchersdigest.com/site/optics/optics_index.aspx

... John Davis

Bush Midnight Regulations

During his last days in office President Bush aims to benefit the Administration's corporate allies in the oil, mining, and other destructive industries.

Just this week the Bush Administration repealed a law in place since 1983 that prohibits coal mining activities within 100 feet of flowing streams. This change is a parting gift to the coal industry and will make it even easier for coal companies to continue Mountaintop Removal Mining, which is already decimating Appalachia.

And following their aggressive efforts to open our public lands to drilling, mining, and other destructive activities they are now preparing to hold a fire sale of some of the West's most precious remaining open spaces, including plans that would put oil rigs within view of some of Utah's best known national parks and monuments.

And the Endangered Species Act is also being threatened. They plan to undermine our nation's safety act for nearly 2,000 animals and plants on the brink of extinction by allowing government agencies with no formal wildlife expertise to decide the fate of imperiled species. Instead of consulting with independent scientists, federal agencies would be allowed to consult "with themselves", thus getting rid of the traditional review required by law at present. Of course this new proposal would eliminate the need to consider the impact of global warming!

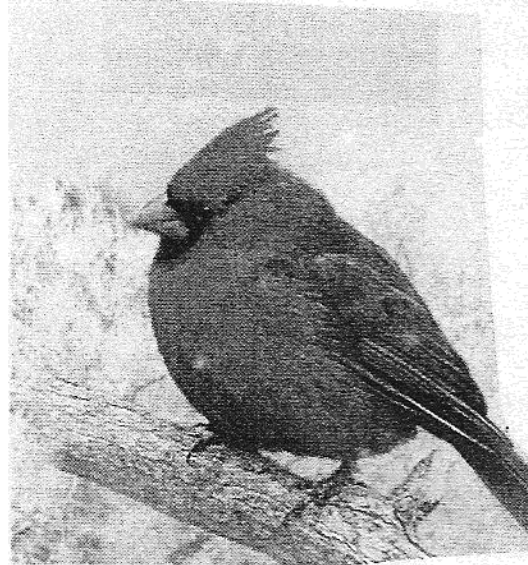
We need to UNDO the disastrous environmental policies and decisions the Bush Administration made the past 8 years. The environment needs to become a critical national priority in 2009 and beyond. We hope the Obama Administration can make urgent progress on many critical fronts: make sure that dangerous regulations decreed by the Bush Administration in the last 60 days are never implemented: fight pollution that fouls our water and air: implement a clean energy policy that ensures that we will address climate change: demand that the agencies charged with protecting our wildlands and wildlife strongly enforce environmental protections.

A challenge indeed with our country and the world all awaiting his wisdom and leadership.

... Jean Miller

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society
 PO Box 544
 Oneonta, NY 13820-0544
www.doas.us

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Membership Application

Membership in the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Soc. includes 9 issues of our newsletter, *The Belted Kingfisher*. Cost is \$15 annually or \$25 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.

* Until 2-1-09 cost is \$12 & \$20. See pg. 4.

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

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

E-MAIL _____

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

Do you know a good location for a field trip ?

All meetings are free and open to the public