



Volume 42 Number 10
January 2011

THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

COMING ACTIVITIES

DECEMBER

12/18: Christmas Bird Count

12/31 The Fort Plain Christmas Bird Count

JANUARY

1/15 - Field trip to Delaware County reservoirs to view wintering Bald Eagles

1/16 - Statewide waterfowl count

1/21 - Program - Miriam A Sharick, Instructor Delhi College, Superheroes of Biodiversity

FEBRUARY

2/18 - Program - Jillian Liner, NY State Audubon, The NY State Kestrel Project

MORE INFO ON
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All DOAS programs are free and open to the public.

Jean Miller

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society founder and its longest serving president, Jean Miller, passed away December 7, 2010. Jean has been an integral part of this organization since she, along with Johanna Koenig and others, started it in 1968. She served as president for 13 consecutive years in the 1970s and 1980s, and was either an officer or director from 1968 until the time of her passing.

As president, Jean Miller grew DOAS from a small group of local Oneontans to a sound, involved regional organization—one of the most active and influential Audubon Chapters in the state. She broadened its education activities and was instrumental in the establishment of our wildlife sanctuary on Franklin Mt. Her husband Bob also plays a large role in DOAS, as past editor of The Belted Kingfisher, and coordinator of the spring migration and Christmas bird counts.

Jean was involved in many environmental issues, within DOAS and elsewhere. One of her conservation passions has been world population growth—perhaps as important an issue as there is, considering it impacts every aspect of the environment. This is a difficult and contentious issue, but it can't be ignored, and



Jean kept us in Audubon and many others focused on how critical addressing population is. She continued her conservation work even until her hospitalization, leading DOAS in our review of the impacts of gas drilling in the area and our position to oppose this drilling on the basis of its long term threats to our land and waters.

There is no individual who has been a more continuing and influential presence in DOAS than Jean; the empty space she leaves in our group cannot be overstated.

Jean Miller lived a life of love and concern and commitment to the natural world—a life we all could emulate. The condolences of our entire organization go out to Bob and the Miller family.

Andy Mason

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



*"seeing a
Snowy Owl
is a highlight"*

winter is, the season does have some interesting highlights. I cannot wait to see if the Short-eared owls return in numbers. Also, seeing a Snowy Owl is a highlight I look forward to all year. Diminutive kinglets always make me smile as they flit about and hover in search of food. And with luck I may even have Pine Grosbeaks grace my feeders like they did two winters ago.

Make no mistake; I still despise the fierce grip of winter. Without these few highlights, I would be a shut in for three months. There are a few walks and trips I will brave this winter despite the conditions. Our Christmas Bird Count, December 18, is a great excuse to get out and find as many birds as we can for that day. We also conduct a Christmas Count in the Fort Plain area. This year that will take place on December 31. My favorite trip of the winter is our annual Eagle Trip. Seeing up to 20 Eagles and lots of waterfowl will even get me away from the fireplace. Please check our great website for details on all these trips.

Keep warm, and have a safe and Happy Holiday Season.

David Kiehm
President, DOAS



All of us on the DOAS Board were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Director Jean Miller.

I only worked with Jean for a couple of years but her passion for all things environmental, especially the omnipresent hydrofracking issue, was inspiring and at times amazing. Please read a more detailed account of Jean's triumphs in Andy Mason's memorial on the front page.

HARBINGERS

For those who know me well.... Know that I don't like winter. As I sit with Maggie this morning, coffee in hand, sun pores in the sunroom windows. There is a heavy frost but it does not look like "winter" yet. I refuse to be fooled.

October 14 a small flock of Pine Siskins made an appearance at one of our feeders. Purple Finches and juncos are here in very large numbers. On October 25 eight Evening Grosbeaks invaded the black oil feeder. We did not even see a Grosbeak last year and this group was the earliest we have ever had them visit. We have not seen Redpolls yet but could they be far behind?

All these harbingers can only mean one thing - cold, wind, and snow.... As miserable as the thought of

THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY FOUNDED 1968

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GERIANNE CARILLO

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PLEASE ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO:

DELAWARE OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY
P.O. Box 544
ONEONTA, NY 13820
EMAIL: INFO@DOAS.US

WEB ADDRESS: www.doas.us

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COVER ARTWORK BY DAVE KIEHM

CONSERVATION AND LEGISLATION

By Andy Mason

A grim 2011 for NY's environment—It's hard to be anything but pessimistic for the environment in the coming year in NY State. Budget cuts, a likely gridlocked legislature, and a new governor who does not seem to make protection of our natural areas a priority, all point to a standstill at best, and backsliding on the environment at worst.

The damage has already begun. Outgoing Governor David Paterson announced major personnel cuts in an already under-staffed Department of Environmental Conservation. Over 200 positions were originally slated to be lost, although that number now appears to be lower.

Although the cuts are part of a larger workforce reduction in state government, DEC is bearing 10 percent of all state layoffs, although the agency only accounts for 2.5 percent of the total state workforce. And this is on top of major losses in recent years:

- **In the last 2.5 years, the agency has lost 595 employees, 16 percent of its workforce.**
- **The DEC's non-personal services budget (travel and equipment for inspections, oil clean ups) has been cut in half from 2007-08 to 2010-11.**

Locally, the most noticeable impact of these cuts will likely be the announced closing of the Rogers Environmental Education Center in Sherburne, Chenango County. This wonderful facility has provided environmental and conservation opportunities for thousands of children and adults. One of four such facilities in the state, the Rogers Center exemplified the best of DEC and its staff.

Even without an anticipated demand for more inspectors should hydrofracked gas drilling proceed, it is obvious DEC cannot meet its obligations to preserve and protect the state's environment. Incoming Governor Andrew Cuomo has not specifically addressed the DEC cuts, but he did make downsizing state government a major theme of his campaign. His previous experience has been

in social services and law enforcement, so it is likely he will not be particularly sympathetic to the needs of DEC.

As for the legislature, it appears that the Senate will be in Republican hands, while the Assembly remains Democratic—a recipe that has kept environmental initiatives in stalemate for decades. Even the champions of the environment in the legislature will have a tough time keeping the wolves away over the next couple of years at least.

What you can do—

Contact Governor-elect Cuomo before he takes office and tell him the environment is important to NYers, present and future. Ask him to not disproportionately slash DEC's staff and budget—our air, water and lands will suffer.

Keep up the pressure on your State Senator and Assemblymember. They can be expected to work to protect local interests, but DEC needs to be effective statewide, and not spread so thin they can't do their job.

ADDRESSES

NY STATE

*Gov.-elect Andrew Cuomo
The Capitol
Albany, NY 12224*

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*

STATE ASSEMBLY

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

Help the Birds with your Pellet Stove!

Andy Mason

As most Auduboners know, one of the groups of birds in most serious decline are those that utilize grassland habitat for nesting and wintering. Birds such as meadowlarks, harriers, Henslow's Sparrows and others are considered at risk in New York and elsewhere as the fields they need are either growing up to brush, or are cut early in the season, destroying nests.

There is little incentive for landowners to mow their fields in late summer, which would protect nests, and keep brush at bay. Hay quality is poor at that time and the expense of mowing is significant. However, a local company may be providing that incentive, while producing a sustainable local energy source.

Enviro Energy LLC, of Wells Bridge, is producing stove pellets from locally-grown grass as an alternative to wood pellets for these heaters. Grass pellets produce virtually the same amount of heat as wood pellets and burn just as cleanly. The price of grass pellets is comparable to wood pellets and they work in the same stoves, although multi-fuel stoves are preferred. Grass pellets do produce somewhat more ash than wood, but this is a non-toxic residue that can be used as a soil additive.

In addition to keeping fields open for birds, other environmental benefits of harvesting grass for pellets include lower soil erosion than tilled fields,

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ATTRACTING WINTER BIRDS TO YOUR BACKYARD

Observing winter birds from the comfort of one's home can offer hours of fascination for all ages, while providing wildlife with needed food. During the winter, birds may have difficulty finding adequate food to fuel their bodies, especially on harsh weather days. If you're interested in attracting winter birds to your backyard, here are answers to some frequently asked questions:

WHAT SHOULD WE FEED OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS?

Sunflower seed

Cardinals, woodpeckers, blue jays, goldfinches, purple finches, chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches prefer sunflower seed. Use black oil sunflower as its more nutritious, easier to eat, and cheaper than the kind we eat. Put most of your sunflower seeds in hanging feeders. It's safer from squirrels and raccoons that way.

For information on other seed types: www.birdwatching.com/tips/birdfeedingwinter.html

Suet/Peanut Butter

High energy snacks in the form of Peanut butter or suet (beef fat) offer chickadees, woodpeckers and nuthatches a good winter snack. Peanut butter can be spread on tree trunks, branches or feeding platforms, or placed in small holes drilled in a log. Suet should only be offered in cold weather, to prevent it from becoming rancid.

WHERE CAN I BUY BIRD FOOD?

Feed stores, nurseries, supermarkets, and some hardware stores offer bird seed. The best place to store seeds is in mouse-proof metal cans in a cool dry place to avoid mold. Trash cans work great for large quantity storage .Avoid buying pre-mixed birdseed.

WHAT TYPES OF FEEDER(S) SHOULD BE USED?

Three types of feeders

1. Tube feeders - typically hung from trees or posts are excellent for finches, titmice, and chickadees.

2. Hopper feeders - often hung from trees, decks and poles. These feeders are especially suitable for larger tree species such as cardinals, jays and grosbeaks.



3. Tray feeders - typically placed close to the ground and attract ground-feeding birds such as juncos.

There are many commercially available bird feeders and on-line sources of feeder types for planning and purchasing.

FEEDER PLACEMENT

Place feeders in an area free of disturbance yet easy to view and refill. Try to provide natural cover from winter winds and predators. Evergreens provide excellent winter protection.

A distance of ten feet from any tree or jumping off point usually provides safety from house cats and squirrels.

Keep feeders clean by washing them frequently, scrubbing them with soap and water then dipping them in a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water. Rinse well and allow thorough drying before refilling.

Periodically rake birdseed hulls

beneath feeders to avoid spread of bacteria from decomposing hulls. What about providing birds with water?

WATER

A source of water can be more important than food, especially in cold/dry conditions. Unfrozen water is necessary to birds in winter, not only for drinking, but for keeping birds' feathers clean and fluffy to provide insulation for warmth.

If a natural water source is not available nearby, a shallow birdbath, pan, or even garbage can lid can provide necessary water. Just ensure the water is kept clean, unfrozen and refilled frequently.

PLANTINGS

Additionally, you can provide a variety of plantings that will provide shelter and food for backyard birds.

Eileen Kline

Help the Birds with your

Pellet Stove! *continued from page three*

maintaining a diversity of habitats, and reduced energy usage for transport of this local product. Grass pellets have the potential to keep marginal farms in operation by providing income for otherwise unusable hay. And of course, this renewable resource has significantly lower emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants.

If you are interested in trying grass pellets, contact Enviro Energy at (607) 988-9013, or visit their website at www.enviroenergyny.com.

FAVORITE PLACES SERIES:

LONG POND STATE FOREST

Located on the western border of Chenango County, this state forest of over 3200 acres is less known for its forested areas than for its extensive managed grasslands and its excellent fishing pond; however, the forested portions are of considerable interest also. To reach Long Pond from Otsego County one takes NY 23 west from Oneonta to Norwich, NY 12 south to a mile below Oxford, and County Road 3 eleven miles west to join NY 41 at Smithville Flats. NY 41 runs through the heart of the state forest just northwest of this village. (If you own a DeLorme Atlas and Gazetteer of New York, see Map 48. The DEC also has a map and useful descriptive information that can be accessed by typing in Long Pond State Forest on the Google search engine.)

I visited Long Pond this past June 19 with my wife and two friends, hoping to see – among other birds – the Henslow’s and grasshopper sparrows that are reported to nest in small numbers in the grasslands. We saw neither, but enjoyed meadowlarks, bluebirds, kingbirds and numerous redwings in the grassy and shrubby areas. The grass was tall and wet but one could walk along the highway and scan both grassland and forest habitats from there. If we had visited a couple of weeks earlier, bobolinks and savannah sparrows doubtless would have been active over the fields, but we saw none on this day. There are 10 state forest campsites located around the lake, several featuring huge white oaks; red crossbills have been reported in nearby red pine and Norway spruce stands, and red-shouldered hawks nest in an old hemlock forest south of the lake, which we did not have time to visit. Round Pond, accessible from Smithville Flats by a separate road, is a good place to see a variety of wetland-loving birds. With its diversity of habitats and its extensive open areas managed by the DEC for grassland birds, Long Pond State Forest is definitely worth a day’s foray – or even an overnight camping trip – by birders from Otsego or Delaware County!

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.

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

NAME: _____

PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL: _____

**The Waiting Game**

The passing of Jean Miller, a tireless warrior for the environment once again highlights the

need to cross generations to educate and train our future protectors and defenders of our environment on a global and local level. Jean’s involvement over the past two years with the local assault on our public health, water, infrastructures proposed by the natural gas corporations was documented by her many articles in this newsletter..

Until yesterday the Moratorium bill (no drilling of vertical and horizontal wells till May 2011) was sitting on the desk of Governor Paterson awaiting his signature.. . The fight against hydrofracking a proven threat to public health and safety on numerous levels has been documented, scientifically proven, but once again the concerned citizens, advocates for the environment, wildlife and birds awaited the decisions that sat in a committee or on a desk of the people who were elected to protect the public health, welfare and safety of their constituents. We waited for the results which ended in a punt from Governor Paterson to the incoming Andrew Cuomo.. Paterson vetoed legislation that was passed in the House and the Assembly that would have placed a moratorium on natural gas drilling (all wells, vertical and horizontal) until May 15th, 2011. The Executive order by the outgoing governor firms up the date to July 1st.2011 while he directed the DEC to put into place assurances and safety regulations for hydrofracking. These dates of course can be countermanded by Cuomo.. We wait to see what the incoming governor and the month of July will bring, along with the DEC, the agency charged with

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HAWKWATCH NEWS

Last month's hawkwatch news started off with "The Goldens are coming!" Unfortunately that hasn't proven to be the case. This season's Golden Eagle numbers are the lowest in recent years, and it looks as if we will have to struggle to reach 100 of these big birds. As of the first week of December, the count stood at 89; normally we would be closing in on 150 or more—with some years resulting in over 200.

It's difficult to know the reason for this decline. It doesn't appear to be a sudden drop in population—Golden Eagles are long-lived birds, and other hawkwatches along the Appalachians are near their normal numbers—although the birds did appear somewhat late this fall. Most likely some quirks in weather patterns upstream caused the birds to divert from their usual migratory path. Even if the eagles were flying a mile or two further north, we would miss them.

Not all is as dismal as the Golden Eagle picture though. Bald Eagles have made an great showing, in fact setting a new seasonal record of over 200 this year. The previous high was 185 in 2003. The early season was excellent, with a record of 2342 Broad-winged Hawks. Total raptors stand at 6271, which makes this the 3d biggest year in the 22 year history of the count. Also notable is a Swainson's Hawk, spotted by Steve Hall on Oct. 27—the first time this western species has been seen at Franklin Mt.

Counting will continue on days with promising conditions until New Years. If you visit, conditions will be cold, and snow will affect visibility on days with northwest and west winds. Directions to the hawkwatch and further information are available at www.franklinmt.org.

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overseeing the safety and public health through regulations on hydrofracking, while handing out the permits to the gas corporations. Conflict of interest anyone?

For the younger generations, they too await the passage of a bill, that could deliver to them the education and training for careers in environmentally sustainable fields. . The No Child Left Inside (NCLI) bills are now in the House Committee on Education and Labor and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. The reality is they are unlikely to be passed in 2010.

The National Association for Environmental Education has stated that in spite of serious budget cuts, environmental education organizationally and pedagogically is the strongest it has ever been, but strong organized advocacy on

The Waiting Game

behalf of the No Child Left Inside Act will need strategies and effective action to bring this bill into a policy that will ensure the younger generations are able to create a healthy and sustainable environment in the future.

DOAS, and the Family Outreach Committee, Eileen Kline, Barbara Marsala, Eleanor Moriarty continue to plan events that engage families and young people in the activities of birding and the environment.. With the No Child Left Inside Act becoming a reality in the primary and secondary schools, our outreach efforts would have a much greater impact. It would be wonderful to think of our Audubon Sanctuary being utilized as a field lab for these young minds..

Perhaps a part of any of our legacies is the brief moments that we are

New York State Young Birders Club

DOAS is a sponsoring organization of the NY State Young Birders Club, a special project of the NY State Ornithological Assoc. for youths age 10 to 19. The YBC is growing and now is at its highest membership and continues as an active group.

Below are excerpts from a recent report by 16-year old club president Benjamin Van Doren. If you know of a young birder who might be interested in joining the club, or would like to learn more or support the kids, visit www.nysyoungbirders.org.

"On August 14, members of the New York State Young Birders Club converged on Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge in what has become somewhat of an annual tradition since the club's inaugural field trip to the refuge in August of 2008. In the intervening

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fortunate enough to experience when we engage some young person with the excitement of discovering the environment.. It brings a true sense of joy.. The tireless warrior Jean smiled a lot around young people, for she shared so much of her joy and experience with the wonders out there.

Look for our outreach committee to advocate each month and please check out website for updates on actions Federal, State, local directed toward environmental education .

In the meantime, push those elected to follow the correct course to ensure that our citizens, our environment, our next generations will have the right to clean air, clean water and a healthy environment. We might not have the luxury to wait much longer.

Eleanor Moriarty

***Delaware-Otsego County
Audubon Society***
**Superheros of
Biodiversity**

The first monthly program meeting for 2011, will be on Friday January 21st at 7:30m in the Elm Park Methodist Church, located at 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

Miriam A. Sharick , a native New Yorker, with a BS from Cornell and a MS from SUNY Oneonta will present the “Superheros of Biodiversity. Miriam Sharick since the mid 90’s been a biology instructor at Delhi college in Delhi.. Her impressive background as the Curatorial Assistant in the section of birds at Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh and her wide range of interests in all environmental areas will guarantee a entertaining and educational evening

The monthly meeting and presentation is free and open to the public.. Refreshments are served.

**For further information, contact:
Eleanor Moriarty,**

WATERFOWL COUNT



The NY State Ornithological Association’s annual statewide waterfowl count is scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 16, 2011. DOAS covers Otsego Lake and the Susquehanna River above Unadilla, the Unadilla River, and Cannonsville Reservoir and the W. Branch of the Delaware River. This effort involves surveying waterways where they can be seen, and identifying and counting ducks and geese. The totals are used by the Department of Environmental Conservation in managing these species over the upcoming year.

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

EAGLE TRIP SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 15, 2011

Sat., Jan. 15, 2011 is 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 and participants can be picked up en route in Delhi and Walton. Return to Oneonta will be mid to late afternoon.

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

New York State Young Birders Club

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two years, NYSYBC and its members have emerged as prominent voices in the regional birding community, as the club runs monthly field trips to birding hotspots around New York and competes in birding events from New Jersey to Massachusetts. We’ve grown from a group of eight enthusiastic young birders on that first trip to a network of twenty youth members, nineteen supporting adults, and sixteen partner organizations around the state, with no plans to stop any time soon.”

“We are currently working on initiatives to ensure every New York young birder can enjoy these opportunities. Thanks to generous donations from our supporters, we have

established the NYSYBC Education Fund. . . . We hope to use the Education Fund to help young birders connect, both within the state, such as by reimbursing expenses incurred when traveling to participate in a field trip,

If you know of a young birder who might be interested in joining the club, or would like to learn more or support the kids, visit www.nsybc.org.

and beyond—whether at an enlightening camp in southeastern Arizona or for a unique pelagic opportunity off Massachusetts.

But we also want to make sure we use our resources to take action in a more direct manner, by donating some of the money raised by our World Series of Birding teams to aid in conservation efforts. This year we made a donation to the Boreal Songbird Initiative (borealbirds.org), an organization whose work is vital to the birdlife of this continent.”

“If NYSYBC is to ultimately succeed in this mission, however, there is still much work to be done. Please spread the word about all that we do, and if you’re a young birder reading this, come and join us on one of our field trips to see what we’re all about.”

Andy Mason



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Bird Sightings

I inadvertently I sent the wrong bird article for September-October Bird Sightings. I'm placing the correct article in this issue of The Belted Kingfisher with my sincere apologies. Any bird sightings I've received after 10/17/10 will appear in the February issue.

I'm always amazed by the delightful birding opportunities that exist in our area. As I was walking along my road in Treadwell, I spotted a belted kingfisher perched on a telephone wire above a small pond. As the bird intently peered into the water trying to see well below the surface, three pairs of mallard decoys unassumingly bobbed along the top. It was a bird sighting filled with contrasts.

On 9/19 while digging the last of her potatoes in Treadwell, Dorian Huneke caught sight of a Great Egret flying overhead probably on its way to the East Sidney Dam. On 9/22 on another one of my walks I saw a Turkey Vulture skipping along the edge of the road peering into the bush apparently looking for road kill. A little further down the way, I flushed out a Ruffed Grouse from a brushy area. The next day as I was driving through Bloomville I interrupted a Turkey Vulture from pursuing its road kill lunch. This was probably much to the delight of another Turkey Vulture circling overhead. Barbara Fletcher was excited

to see a Bald Eagle soaring among the clouds and hanging around a beaver pond near her home in Sanford on 9/27.

October ushered in many torrential days of rain. While biking the Rail to Trail in South Kortright on 10/3 Kathy Mario noticed a Green Heron trying to figure out how to fish the super swollen river. Tom Salo thinks it's been a good year for Eastern Meadowlarks. In early October he reported a group of six that continue to be found in an overgrown hayfield in W. Burlington. On 10/4 Kathy Mario saw 12 American Goldfinches feasting on her coneflowers in Delhi. A Common Yellowthroat looked on with interest. On 10/8 a Ring-necked pheasant made a surprise visit to Elma Holway's backyard in Mt. Vision. It was a great photo shoot for her husband. That same day I watched a flock of 30 American Goldfinches pluck seeds from sunflower plants whose heads were bent over from the weight of their succulent food source. A lonely Eastern Bluebird shot past. Tom Salo had sightings of both White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows in W. Burlington on 10/13. The next day he heard an Eastern Screech-Owl calling. On 10/16 a family member of Tom's reported a juvenile Snowy Owl in Oneonta. The bird was flecked with black.

Dianne Benko