

THE BELTED KINGFISHER



DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

FOUNDED 1968 ● P.O. BOX 544, ONEONTA, NY 13820

Volume 40, Number 3, March 2008

Guest Editor:
Gerianne Carillo

COMING ACTIVITIES

- March 18th: Board Meeting at the home of Cheryl Boise
March 28th: DOAS General Meeting: *All About Bluebirds, and More*, featuring John Rogers
Note: Date is the 4th Friday (program description below)
March 29th: Field trip to Montezuma NWR, with trip leader Eleanor Moriarty (see Page 5)
April 6th: Waterfowl field trip, Otsego Lake and tributaries; leaders Matt Albright, Bob Donnelly, and John Davis
April 15th: Board Meeting at the home of Barbara Marsala
April 18th: DOAS General Meeting: *Important Bird Areas: Priority Birds and Conservation*, presented by Jillian Limer of Audubon New York
May 16th: DOAS General Meeting (***Note Topic Change***): *Coyote Ecology: Current Research in Status and Foraging of the Population*, Dr. Jacqueline Frair, speaker
May 20th: Board Meeting at the home of Bob Donnelly

ALL ABOUT BLUEBIRDS, AND MORE

John Rogers, co-founder of the New York State Bluebird Society, will present this topic at our general meeting on Friday, at 7:30 PM, March 28th at the Elm Park Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut St., Oneonta. Learn about the life history and ecology of our official state bird, the Eastern Bluebird, from a recognized expert who maintains a trail of hundreds of nest boxes which have fledged over 8,900 bluebirds. His slide presentation will include the bluebird's nesting cycles, habitat and food sources, and he will stress nest-box management. The focus is on bluebirds, but he will include other birds, along with wildflowers and butterflies. ****Please note that, due to observance of Good Friday, this program is on the fourth Friday in March!**** Refreshments will be served. For further information, call Eleanor Moriarty, DOAS Program Director, at 607-278-5896 or eleanor@dmcom.net.

Please Note: Due to a scheduling issue, our previously advertised May presenter is unable to be with us on our usual meeting date - thus the change of topic. We hope to be able to offer this topic at some future date.

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.

President's Column

First the Bad News

In early February rumors began circulating about a Great Blue Heron rookery in a beaver pond being destroyed. Further investigation determined that someone with a chainsaw had cut down trees containing 20 nests in a productive 25 year old heronry in the Town of Hartwick. No one knows why this was done or who did it. Whatever the reason, it smacks of a 19th-century attitude towards wildlife. When are we going to finally respect the rights of other species to exist? One of our Directors reported the destruction to DEC law enforcement personnel. DEC is investigating.

The beaver population explosion of several decades ago created a lot of ideal heron breeding habitat. The birds will nest in forests over hard ground. However, preferred sites are trees surrounded by water. The risk of predators is greatly reduced when the herons are protected by a moat. The age of most local beaver ponds is such that many of the nest trees are now rotting. Branches that held up nests collapse and the trees topple. We are seeing more and more rookeries abandoned and in decline. As productive rookeries become less common, we may begin to notice declines in the population.

This pond is at the juncture of several properties. Some of the property owners are enraged by this destructive act which left only a few nests standing in the pond. We have reached a verbal agreement with one landowner to allow us to use his part of the pond to construct steel structures with nesting platforms. The platform design has been successfully used in New Hampshire. If we can formalize the agreement in a meeting with the landowner on February 24, we intend to act to complete this project before the ice melts. We hope that providing nest sites will mitigate the damage.



Felled tree and heron nests at the active rookery

At the February 19th meeting, the DOAS board approved an unbudgeted, emergency expenditure of \$1600 to construct these platforms. I hope this project is completed by the time you read this newsletter. Ice must remain on the pond so our time to act is short. Check our website for the current status of the rookery restoration.

If you would like to help rebuild the DOAS treasury by donating to this project, feel free to contact me, or send a check to our PO Box (*ed: see back page for address*). Include a note stating what the donation is for.

Not all the wildlife news is bad. I led a school group on a Bald Eagle trip to the West Branch of the Delaware on February 7th. We found 33 different eagles which was quite a thrill for the students and teachers. We also received other good news for this rebounding species: In northern Otsego County, the purchaser of a piece of land with an active Bald Eagle nest contacted us. He wanted to know how to best protect the nest from human disturbance. We've been sharing our knowledge. DEC wildlife staff are also advising this conscientious landowner. This individual's concern and willingness is an exemplary effort to put the interests of the birds first. We hope nest remains successful for many years.

Tom Salo, President
tomsalo@localnet.com
 607-965-8232

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!

Scientific Research

"Happily, scientific research does not stand or fall based on the rage of politicians or scorn of compromised academics. It can only be challenged by more science, more experimentation, more research, and deeper understanding. This explains the Bush administration's unrelenting hostility to the scientific enterprise. It cannot be counted on to provide cover for those who would shortsightedly loot the natural world."

Carl Pope, Executive Director of Sierra Club
 Submitted by Jean Miller

Conservation and Legislation

by Andy Mason

Audubon and wind power—DOAS has been involved with windpower issues for some time now. This growing technology has many environmental advantages over conventional fossil fuel and nuclear electrical generation, including zero air emissions, little if any water or land pollution, no impacts from fuel exploration and extraction, and no waste materials for disposal.

We have adopted a position paper on windpower that expands on these points and encourages properly sited wind projects, with the caveat that adequate studies of potential impacts on birds be carried out. In addition, several years ago DOAS purchased wind credits from a Madison County, NY wind project, which helped close the gap between the costs of windpower and fossil fuel electricity. We also use “green” electricity—generated by wind and small hydro—at the Audubon Sanctuary.

We have commented on statewide proposals to regulate wind projects, including pending draft recommendations from the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation for avian impact studies at windpower sites.

DOAS has provided all municipal boards and planning boards in our Chapter area with copies of our position paper and has offered to discuss the issue with these bodies. We have made presentations to a number of towns and stand ready to do more.

As wind proposals have come forth in the region, we have studied them and participated in the environmental reviews and public discussions of the projects. The above-mentioned Madison project was the first with which DOAS was involved. Others have included a pending project in southern Herkimer County and a proposal in Cherry Valley in Otsego County. At both of these sites we also monitored birds that we thought may be at risk.

We have a particular interest and concern in potential threats to migrating raptors from wind projects, and have also reviewed and commented on proposals in other areas that may be on the route of birds we see at our Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch. The ongoing project to identify Golden Eagle migration paths is part of that effort. (Copies of DOAS wind documents and further information are available at www.doas.us)

The most recent windpower proposal in our area is the Moresville Energy Center planned for the towns of Roxbury and Stamford in Delaware County. The project sponsor, Invenergy LLC, intends to put thirty-three 400 ft. high wind turbines stretching for several miles along a 3000 to 3500 ft. ridge. The project would have a generating capacity of 99 megawatts, estimated by the developer to be enough to power 45,000 homes.

DOAS contacted the Moresville project developer and asked to review any avian impact studies they had carried out. Last summer, Invenergy supplied us with copies of breeding, migration and wintering bird studies from 2005. After considering this information, we wrote Invenergy with a number of concerns over the adequacy of the studies. Primary among these was that radar surveillance of nocturnal migrants—a now-standard procedure for wind projects—was carried out at a site some 1000 ft. lower and 2 1/2 miles from the ridge top where the turbines would be located. Clearly this did not provide an accurate picture of spring and fall songbird migration over the ridge. Nocturnal migrants are considered among those birds at greatest risk from towers.

In addition, only one year of data was gathered for this and the other avian studies at Moresville. Year-to-year variations in migration and bird distributions necessitate multi-year studies, particularly at sites that may concentrate birds, such as ridges.

DOAS also called for an independent review of the avian studies to ensure they were designed and carried out in a professional, scientific manner. We also asked Invenergy to lay out their plans for post-construction mortality studies, an important source of information for future wind projects.

Unfortunately, we received no response from the project developer, and no additional work on bird impacts has been carried out. The Moresville project is now near release of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement that will include these avian studies. If the DEIS is considered adequate by the lead agency—the Town of Roxbury Planning Board—there will not be sufficient information for them to consider threats to birds from the wind turbines.

What you can do: Contact the Roxbury Planning Board and urge that they require Invenergy to perform proper avian impact studies before proceeding with environmental review of the Moresville project. Radar studies should take place on the ridge top, and at least one additional year of migration studies carried out. Also ask that a truly independent panel of ornithologists review Invenergy’s studies for accuracy.

The planning board can be reached at:

Town of Roxbury Planning Board
P.O. Box 189 Main Street
Roxbury, NY 12474
planning@roxburyny.com

Also, copy any communications to:

Mike Triolo, Supervisor
Town of Stamford
188 Main Street, P.O. Box M
Hobart, NY 13788

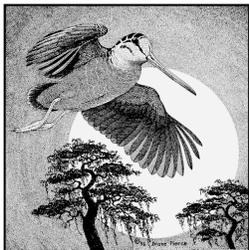
On the Lighter Side...

Coming Soon -- Dancing with the Stars!

As February inches toward March, the sense of anticipation is building. We are still in winter's grip – our list of sightings for the Great Backyard Bird Count tells us that!

But some of the winter birds are beginning to sing, and the days are lengthening noticeably. Rising before dawn the other day, I glanced out the window and rejoiced to see that great southern constellation Scorpio rising above our eastern hill. Scorpio! Familiar friend of our summer sky, but never visible while Orion rules the heavens in winter – what better herald of the turning season, and warmer days to come?

Soon Alice and I will be straining our ears at sunset, listening for the beep--beep--beep that we mistook for a night-hawk when we first heard it back in 2002. We had moved to Leatherstocking country the previous June from southern Pennsylvania, where summer nights were punctuated with the calls of nighthawks. These beeps were remarkably similar, but they varied in intensity and their repetition was much more regular. Of course the early-spring vocaliser was not a nighthawk but a male woodcock, performing the ground-based portion of his famous courtship display, turning in place and proclaiming to all points of the compass that THIS spot, in HIS meadow (ours too!), is where any interested female can find him – and look out if you are another male!



Aldo Leopold, in "A Sand County Almanac", christened the woodcock's display its "Sky Dance", and certainly the aerial portion of the display (when you can see it) is magical: the ground-based beeping suddenly ends, and after a tiny pause the bird rockets upward against the last light of sunset,

often disappearing into the blue-black sky overhead before starting its fluttering, "broken wing" descent in a shower of soft twitters.

The descent ends in a sudden plunge to a landing, usually almost in the spot from which the bird took off. Then begin again the beeps (true ornithologists call them "peents") of the ground-based portion of the display.

The woodcock show begins in our meadow in early April and lasts till the beginning of June. When it starts we carry a couple of lawn chairs up to the meadow so that we can be comfortable in warm coats during the show. Once the beeping begins we train our binoculars toward the sound and - if lucky in the waning light – manage to spot the male on the ground as he turns and calls. Only if we are

successful in this are we likely to see him burst upward and disappear into the sky. We almost never actually see the twittering descent phase, but sometimes glimpse the final plunge back to earth. Once it's too dark to see, we simply listen.

Last fall we had our shaggy meadow brush-hogged. The meadowsweet and goldenrod stalks were getting too rampant, and ground-spotting of woodcocks was becoming increasingly difficult. We're hoping they won't mind the "new look", and that we'll be able to see them better this spring. Yes, the anticipation is building!

Joe Richardson

Roberson Museum and Science Centers presents the work of John James Audubon opening Friday, February 1 @ 6:00 pm.

John James Audubon
American Artist and Naturalist
Roberson Museum and Science Center
30 Front Street, Binghamton, NY 13905
February – June 2008

The Audubon Exhibition presents a rare and valuable selection of original letters, books, photographs, personal items, and sixty of his large hand-colored Double Elephant Folio engravings printed from 1826 – 1838 for *The Birds of America*. This exhibition comes to us from the John James Audubon Museum and State Park at Henderson, Kentucky.

As you would expect, Roberson is adding its own dimension to this wonderful exhibition. More than 60 birds from Roberson's Lee J. Loomis Wildlife Collection will be featured along with the Audubon engravings.

Take part in the various activities that are planned for spring – workshops, lectures, nature walks, bird counts and more. Visit our website for more information.-www.roberson.org

Visit Roberson Museum and Science Center for the John James Audubon exhibition and see the works of this prophetic and visionary master.

Mission Statement: Roberson Museum and Science Center engages people of all ages and backgrounds by providing community relevant exhibitions and programs in art, history and science education.

Montezuma NWR Field Trip

On Saturday, March 29th, the Delaware Otsego Audubon Society will travel to the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge at the north end of Cayuga Lake. The refuge is a major stopover for migrating waterfowl. It is also the home to nesting Bald Eagles, and Sandhill Cranes.

Montezuma contains more than 7000 acres of widely diversified habitat in Seneca and Wayne Counties. It was established in 1938 to provide nesting, resting and feeding areas for the waterfowl and other migratory birds. Habitat ranges from extensive marches to upland hardwoods.

The trip will leave the Dietz St. parking lot across from YMCA in Oneonta at 8 a.m. Carpooling is encouraged and the group can meet participants along the route. Expect to return to Oneonta by evening. Bring lunch, 2 way radios if available, optics and appropriate clothing. Rare birds reported near Montezuma or along the route will be investigated. Contact leader Eleanor Moriarty for further information at 607-278-5896 or 607-435-2054 or email eleanor@dmcom.net.

January-February Bird Sightings

I've been dismayed by the death of two common redpolls found frozen at the base of my metal thistle seed feeder. The two birds died about a week apart in the beginning of February. My husband observed the second one acting sluggish and not flying away with the rest of the flock. We thought it had just crashed into one of our windows and was recuperating. The next day it was dead. Listed below are more cheerful bird sightings.

On 1/13 Bruce Milavec saw 20 cedar waxwings in Milford. Dorian Huneke heard an Eastern screech owl in Treadwell on 1/16. On 1/19 Tom Salo reported a barred owl in W. Burlington and Andy Mason saw 20 snow buntings in Jefferson. A flock of 20 common redpolls was seen by Flo Loomis in the Mt. Vision/Garrettsville area and Kay Crane saw a brown creeper in Walton. I saw a flock of 40 snow buntings in Treadwell on 1/26. On 1/29 Gladys Rayher reported 15 American robins. The next day Tom Salo reported a flock of 70 wild turkeys and 8-10 common ravens in W. Burlington.



In February, on the 9th, Dorian Huneke reported another Eastern screech owl in Treadwell. Tom Salo saw a hoary redpoll in W. Burlington on the 10th. A new reporter of bird sightings, Vicki Johnson, saw rough-legged and red-tailed

hawks in Edmeston on 2/11. Tom & Sue Whitney saw a tree swallow in Delhi on 2/12. Susan Miller saw a red-winged blackbird near Milford on 2/13 and 2/14. On 2/18 Sandy Bright reported a chirping chipping sparrow and 26 cedar waxwings in Oneonta.

Please send sightings to Dianne Benko; 607 829-5218; 6815 Co. Hwy 16, Delhi, NY 13753; caged@wpe.com, by 3/16/08 for the next issue of *The Belted Kingfisher*.

Book Review:

The Toxic Chemistry of Everyday Products

by Mark Schapiro, Chelsea Green \$22.95

Check the ingredient list on your personal care products against the online database of chemical safety information (Environmental Working Group) and you will be shocked to find - "known human carcinogen" and "known human immune system toxicant" or "possible human developmental toxicant", to name just a few. Our government is doing little to protect our environmental health by demanding safer products.

It is shocking to read that Europeans, Japanese, and even Mexican laws have more stringent environmental standards for personal care products, foods, toys, cars and computers, and that MANY AMERICAN MANUFACTURERS ARE MAKING SAFER VERSIONS TO BE SOLD ABROAD! And of course, our more toxic versions are banned by foreign markets!

The EU has both recycling and safety requirements more stringent than ours and, as a consequence, such things as our electronic components are banned for exports. They must be reusable and free of substances such as lead and mercury. EU bases their laws on precaution: "no one is to be harmed by this substance" (and their decisions are based on studies largely conducted by American scientists and the EPA!). The US bases its regulations on "cost/benefit analysis", which too often compromises human health in the process.

Congress so far is not interested in adopting international standards for products, but it would benefit our manufacturers by ensuring that foreign markets would remain open to them, and Americans would benefit health-wise and economically if such an adoption came about.

Jean T. Miller
Onearth, Winter '08
NRDC

Golden Eagle Research Update

As mentioned in last month's issue, no grant money was awarded in New York in 2007 to support our Golden Eagle research plans. We had hoped to put tracking devices on birds at Franklin Mountain. Without grant money, or a significant amount from another source, we cannot carry out this phase of the project. However, we do have plans to utilize the funds raised by DOAS to learn more about Golden Eagle movements in our region and elsewhere. In discussions with Dr. Todd Katzner of the National Aviary – the principal investigator for this research – it was agreed that little is known about the eagles' migration paths through New York. Dr. Katzner supports keeping some of the funds in New York to improve our knowledge of eagle flights through the state.

After agreeing on how to conduct this research in New York, \$3000 of the money donated to DOAS has been sent to The National Aviary. In return, our Chapter is now considered the sponsor of one of the Golden Eagles fitted with a satellite transmitter. The balance of the donated funds will be used for hawk counters who will survey likely Golden Eagle concentration points in New York State. The actual survey sites will be chosen using data collected from the project's telemetered eagles. Andy Mason and Tom Salo plan to travel to the Golden Eagle project's Geographic Information System lab at the Powdermill Avian Research Center in Pennsylvania to meet with their GIS expert and choose prospective survey locations.

All data gathered from these NY State surveys will be used in the project's migration modeling. The data will also be made available through the hawkcount.org database. This information will help identify where eagles concentrate so threats in those areas can be addressed. Any donations received in 2008 will be used to broaden the scope of these studies in New York State.

Again, we express our appreciation to all who have helped with this effort to protect Golden Eagles.

Additional Contributors to Golden Eagle Research

Due to an error, we neglected to include these contributors in our list of donors last month. Again, thanks to everyone who contributed to this project.

Brenda Best
Bob Donnelly
Urling and Hugh Kingery

Highlights of the February 19th Meeting of the DOAS Board of Directors

Here are some highlights of our most recent Board meeting. Member questions or comments are welcome, and after Board approval, the full minutes are available from John Davis. Members are also invited to attend all Board meetings which are held at various Directors' homes; if interested, contact a Board member.

- We have quickly evolved a plan to place artificial nesting sites in a heron rookery in the Town of Hartwick, where 13 trees with 20 nests were wantonly cut down in January.
- The estate of founding DOAS member, Doris Bliss, has included a gift of over \$5,000 to DOAS.
- The September issue of the Kingfisher will list projected field trips for the ensuing year. We are looking for non-Board members to step forward to lead some of our trips!
- The focus of our Golden Eagle telemetry research project will shift towards field studies to be carried out by DOAS.
- The hospitality program for our general meetings, now manned by volunteers, is a great success.
- Our general meetings are going well, with acclaimed presenters, and it was decided not to include a formal "business meeting" as part of the program.
- A survey of the flora of our Burlington wetland will be carried out this year by Board member Joe Richardson and his wife Alice.
- DOAS and the DEC are helping a new landowner protect a Bald Eagle's nest north of Lake Otsego, after the eagles have moved their nest site to a more exposed position and close to active farmland.
- DOAS will again take part in the April 18th Milford Earth Festival and also in an April 26th event sponsored by the MeadWestvaco packaging company in Sidney.
- President Tom Salo will be attending the Spring Audubon Council meeting March 24-28 in Saratoga. The meeting fosters networking among the 30 New York State Audubon Chapters and Audubon New York.

John Davis, Secretary

To Save Our Forests

Recycled computer paper may be bought at Office Max, Southside, Oneonta. A three ream bundle is on sale currently for \$12.99. By the time this reaches you the price may be back to the regular \$16.49, but it is still worthwhile saving the earth!!

Also, tell tissue manufacturers to stop using virgin wood for throwaway products! You can check the product you buy to see if it has some recycled content.

Jean T. Miller

Our Last Great Wilderness in North America

As we watch the return of our migrating birds this spring, will you realize that they are heading to their favorite nesting areas which are north of us and are our last great wilderness area? The BOREAL FOREST of northern Canada is a bird nursery for the Blackpoll Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, and many more of our favorite birds. Millions of birds return there every spring to breed and raise their young.

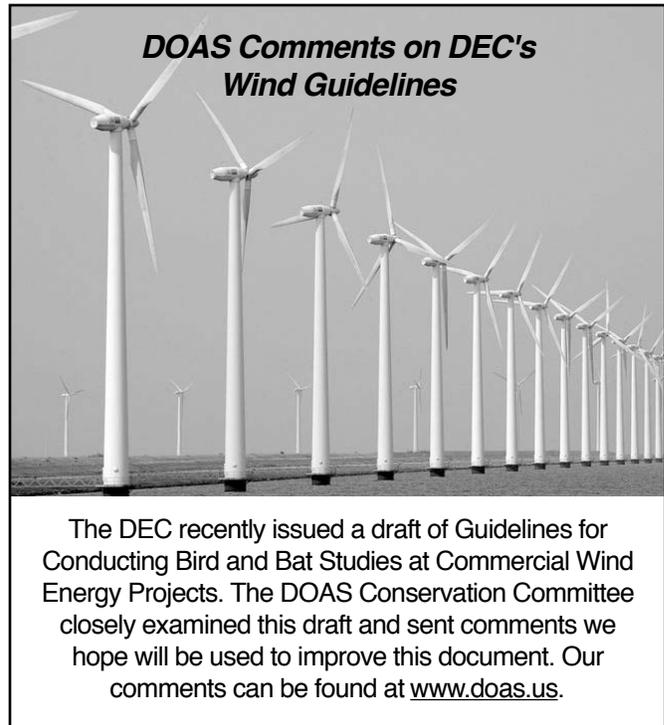
This Boreal Forest is a green blanket stretching from Alaska 3,500 miles across Canada to Newfoundland and encompasses more than 1.5 billion acres. It includes one quarter of the world's remaining intact forests.

And since 1975 more than 60 million acres of forest have been logged. Oil and gas development projects are increasing, and an 800 mile pipeline is planned to speed the Alberta Oil Sands development. This would go through the pristine Mackenzie Valley. Hundreds of millions of acres of the forest are being allocated for industrial uses.

"And the irony of it all is that the very place that produces so many of the birds we love is being destroyed to feed the American appetite for cheap energy, paper and other wood products," says the senior scientist for the Boreal Songbird Initiative, Jeffrey Wells.

Will we still have our migrating birds several decades in the future? It is sad to see Canada go the route of 'cut and dig all for huge profits.'

Jean T. Miller
from *Birdscope*, Cornell Lab of Ornithology



No Owls Seen, But a Great Trip Anyway!

The afternoon of February 23rd was cold and clear, and the 19 participants (*see photo below*) followed leader Bob Donnelly up into the highlands north of US 20 in primary search of Short-eared Owls, spotted there by Bob the day before. Well, the owls were just not cooperative, but the trip, with shared vehicles linked by two-way radios, provided close-up views of Horned Larks and Snow Buntings (thanks, farmers, for spreading that manure!), a flock of Robins and several perched and flying Rough-legged Hawks. Definitely a "positive birding experience" for all! Thanks, Bob; we're already looking forward to next year.

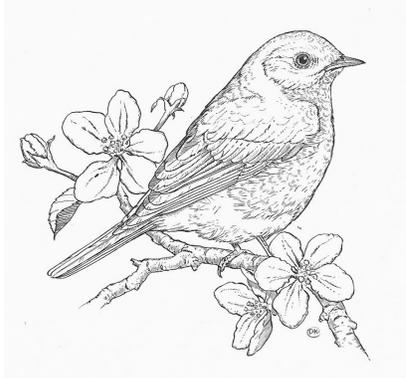
John Davis



Participants eager to begin the DOAS February Owl Trip. Second from right: Leader Bob Donnelly

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society
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Oneonta, NY 13820
www.doas.us

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Eastern Bluebird, by David Kiehm

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Membership Application

Membership in the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society includes 9 issues of our newsletter, *The Belted Kingfisher*. Cost is \$12 annually or \$20 for two 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 indicated on renewal notice.)

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

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.