



# THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

## Coming Activities

### March

**Mar 2** – Big Fracas in Oneonta

**Mar 16** – DOAS Program

**Mar 20** – DOAS Board Meeting

**Mar 24** – DOAS Field Trip

### April

**April 7** – DOAS Field Trip

**April 17** – DOAS Board Meeting

**April 20** – DOAS Program

### May

**May 13** – DOAS Field Trip

**May 18** – DOAS Program

### June

**June 10** – DOAS Field Trip

*More information on page 7*

**All DOAS programs  
are free and open  
to the public**

## How Trees Vote With Their Roots

Almost two decades ago I planted various native trees along a newly made highway bordering my land in Deposit. They grew and prospered. But so has the highway. Every year there have been more trucks whizzing by as our economy grew. Sometimes the stink of diesel fumes is overpowering. And on misty still mornings the air is often foul. Have the trees noticed this? I am beginning to think so. This tale concerns a tree each of three species -- the native bitternut hickory, planted from a nut, a purchased hardy variety of the American persimmon, and a sweetgum grown from seed found in the New York Botanic Garden. A power line parallels the new highway on my side of the road.

A few years ago I had occasion to save the sweetgum from the chainsaws of folks working for the power line owners, and I wished then that I had planted it further from the road and wires. A year or so

later I noticed a root sprout about where I thought I should have planted it, about six feet from the parent trunk. The tree has not yet made fruit or even flowered. Wow! Sweetgums are not known to sucker as far as I can determine. Anyway, last year I found a root sucker from one of my persimmons, about 10 feet from the parent tree, a fruitful female. Well, this



*Persimmons, by Dave Kiehm*

species is known to sucker, but here again the shoot was begun in the direction away from the road. OK. The idea about what is happening did not strike me until this year when the hickory aforementioned also made a sucker about eight feet away

from it and again away from the road. Hickories are not known to sucker and this tree has not yet made fruit even though it has flowered.

There you have it. I believe that my trees are reacting to the offensive highway by moving away from it.

*Stan Salthe*

## President's Message

### Hooray for Skunk Cabbage!

Why Hooray? and why skunk cabbage, for goodness sake? Well, why not! It's March; winter is ending – and skunk cabbage, our earliest wildflower, is already blooming. Reason enough! Ice may still be lingering in the woodland pools and along stream edges where skunk cabbage likes to grow, but it pokes up anyway – and the most impatient part of the plant is the “flower”, nourished from below by a starchy, tuberous corm that may be 100 years old. Imagine!

Skunk cabbage “flowers” are curious things indeed. This familiar plant and its equally familiar cousin, Jack-in-the-pulpit, are members of the Arum family, whose “flower” really is a bunch of tiny flowers borne on a knobby central stalk – the spadix – more or less enclosed by a much-modified leaf – the spathe. (In the case of Jack-in-the-pulpit, Jack is the spadix and the pulpit with its overhanging roof is the spathe.) Besides protecting the spadix, the enclosing spathe of both plants functions as a chamber where the foul-smelling aroma of the flowers can build up to a greater concentration before escaping to attract the tiny carrion flies that serve as pollinators.

The most surprising feature of skunk cabbage is that as the minute flowers approach maturity they literally come into heat. The entire spadix ramps up its metabolism to that of a small warm-blooded animal, creating a local temperature well above that outside the spathe. On a cold late-winter day the spadix may be as much as 35 F warmer than the outside air! This remarkable heat production not only protects the flowers from frostbite; it also helps volatilize the “perfume” so that it can be wafted to nearby pollinators, who may mistake the spadix for a piece of rotting meat. The insects may be disappointed, but the flowers get pollinated!

At the risk of cold, wet feet you can feel the heat of skunk cabbage if you poke your finger inside its spathe and touch the spadix. The temperature difference can be most easily detected if the air is still and the outside temperature cold. One of the easiest places to find skunk cabbage in bloom is along the little stream that passes beneath NY 28 between Hannaford's and Home Depot on Oneonta's Southside. But watch for traffic!

If spring wildflowers entice you, check next month's *Kingfisher* for details about DOAS' late-May flower walk around Gilbert Lake. You'll see - and smell - skunk cabbage's big green leaves (too late for its flowers), and enjoy later-blooming species like Jack-in-the-pulpit, lady's slipper, azalea, and a host of others. It'll be warbler season too – so bring binoculars!

*Joe Richardson*



*Skunk Cabbage, by Dave Kiehm*

#### THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

#### AUDUBON SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1968

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Helen McLean

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To contribute notes or articles for *The Belted Kingfisher* please send to “Kingfisher Editor” at the above address, or email:

[editor@doas.us](mailto:editor@doas.us)

# Conservation and Legislation

**New York State's conservation dollars**—It's budget season in Albany, with the Governor and legislature beginning the annual struggle over spending and priorities for the next fiscal year. The environment has taken some heavy hits in recent budget cycles, with deep cuts to the Department of Environmental Conservation funding translating to unfilled positions and important programs being suspended or eliminated.

This year Gov. Andrew Cuomo's proposed budget holds the line on staffing and programs at DEC and the Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation. Also, the Environmental Protection Fund—the source of money for many environmental programs—is maintained at \$134 million dollars. Although far from adequate to meet the state's needs, these proposals are considered good news in light of the current economic climate.

However, it is far from certain that this staffing and funding will remain intact. Competing interests for state dollars will push to again raid the EPF, and DEC personnel seem to be an easy target when trying to balance the budget. It is important that we let our state legislators know that the environment is important to New York's citizens and economy.

**What you can do**—Contact your State Senator and Assemblymember and let them know you support adequate funding for DEC and the Parks Office. Remind them that the Environmental Protection Fund has been raided repeatedly in recent years, and that the backlog of projects and land acquisition is growing as a result. Tell them that the EPF funding of \$134 million is an absolute minimum for this important work. DEC in particular is barely able to carry out its statutory obligations and pollution regulations and other environmental laws are not being enforced as a result. Any further staff cuts will cripple this agency.

**Bird-Smart Wind Development**—The federal government estimates 440,000 birds are currently killed each year by collisions with wind turbines. Expansion of wind power in the US will likely result in the deaths of more than one million birds annually by 2030. Wind energy projects are also expected to adversely impact almost 20,000 square miles of wildlife habitat.

The flip side is that wind power has many environmental benefits over conventional power production—no air emissions, oil spills, or mountaintop removal for coal mining, among others. Most environmental organizations, including DOAS, recognize that there can be a net benefit from wind power if it is done correctly, including proper siting of projects.

To this end, the American Bird Conservancy is petitioning the US Fish and Wildlife Service to develop regulations that will safeguard wildlife and reward responsible wind energy development. These regulations would replace the present voluntary guidelines that have proven inadequate to protect birds. ABC's petition proposes a model rule that would allow the government to consider impacts of wind farms on all bird species, as well as bats and other wildlife.

**What you can do**—The next step in this process is to convince the Fish and Wildlife Service to open a public comment period about the petition and initiate a rulemaking to regulate wind energy. You can make this request to: Jerome Ford, Director, Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, DC. 20240. More information on ABC's effort—including a link to a click and send letter--can be found at [www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org).

*Andy Mason*

**Diane Graf encountered an accommodating Bald Eagle near Glimmerglass State Park in late January.** *"I was driving on Mill Rd. which borders the State Park and caught a glimpse of the eagle perched in a tree not too far from the road. Needless to say, I slammed on the brakes, groceries went flying and I grabbed for my camera which just happened to be on the passenger seat. The eagle stayed put for quite a long time and I was able to get ten photos. I was quite thrilled, needless to say."*



## DEC Campership Donations Sought

DOAS is partnering with Otsego County Conservation Association (OCCA) to provide one of up to eight DEC Camperships for area middle school students during the Summer of 2012. Each week-long Campership costs \$350. DOAS is seeking contributions towards this program to provide meaningful and needed outdoor experiences to children. Camperships will be awarded through a competitive essay contest this spring with a culminating awards event that will take place at a special outdoor education day for families of all applicants. Contributions towards this program in any amount are welcomed by check to DOAS, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544; please write "Campership 2012" in memo area. All tax-deductible contributions will be acknowledged in writing and must be received by Friday, May 11, 2012. Thank you in advance for your support!

*Susan O'Handley*



*DEC Camp Colby, courtesy NYS DEC*



*Kayaking at Camp Colby, courtesy NYS DEC*

### **Mary Dobinsky, 1920-2012**

*Long-time DOAS member Mary Dobinsky passed away Jan. 12, 2012 in New Berlin, NY. Mary was an active and knowledgeable birder in our area for many years. Her regular trips and reports with her good friend and birding companion Kathryn Wilson provided a valuable body of information on avian distribution and populations in the region.*

*Mary served through the 1990s as Region 4 editor for The Kingbird, journal of the then Federation of NY State Bird Clubs. Her well-written reports gave an excellent picture of bird activity throughout the region. I participated in my first Christmas Bird Count with Mary, as a relative novice, and was most impressed with her understanding of birds and their habitats—she obviously had a love and appreciation for them.*

*Our condolences go out to Mary's family.*

*Andy Mason*



### **DOAS is Now Part of the Facebook Community**

Why join us here?

- Be notified of all planned outings and presentations
- Pictures and details of events posted regularly
- Get involved with member discussions on our Facebook wall
- Become "friends" with likeminded people in the Delaware/Otsego area
- Get updated news on birding and other related topics

Find us online at:

[www.facebook.com/DelawareOtsegoAudubonSociety](http://www.facebook.com/DelawareOtsegoAudubonSociety)

We look forward to interacting with all new participants.

*Tiffany Wilkie – Facebook Administrator*

## Winter and Spring Golden Eagles

The fall Golden Eagle migration at the Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch is well known. We've been documenting their passage for more than 2 decades. In recent years we have been conducting spring migration counts in our region. We have also monitored the presence of goldens in winter using baited camera traps for 3 years now.

This spring we are scheduling hawk counters to record migrating raptors at 2 sites in early March. Unlike our counts of 2009 and 2010, these sites are not part of a transect. They are upstream and downstream of each other in the Susquehanna watershed. Counters will be stationed at Davis State Park and Franklin Mountain. A one day count at Franklin Mountain last spring was promising and suggested that more spring counting at that site would be interesting. The Davis park site had very good eagle numbers in 2010. Last spring was disappointing at many ridge sites in the east including Davis park. The late winter/early spring weather in 2011 dispersed the big soaring birds instead of concentrating them on the ridges. We hope for better winds this season.

We are focusing our efforts on the second week of March but counting could happen anytime a counter is free during that month. We hope to have counters at Davis park and Franklin on as many of the same days as possible during our target period so we can compare numbers at the 2 sites. We might also be able to identify individual birds that pass both sites. Spotters are always helpful. If you would like to help with these counts, contact me for more information.

Again this winter, we used wildlife cameras - weather-proof, motion-activated digital cameras - in an effort to locate winter resident Golden Eagles. We had 5 sites operating in Otsego County, and 1 in Chenango. Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, Rough-legged Hawks, Common Ravens, American Crows, coyotes, a fisher, skunks, raccoons and foxes were all photographed this winter. The exceptionally warm winter was very likely

the reason skunks and raccoons were seen in mid-winter. They usually don't show until very late winter or early spring.

One northern Otsego site had many Common Ravens and Bald Eagles. Four of at least 14 Bald Eagles were banded. Two of those were identified. A male bird with a purple band was captured with a rocket net in MD in January 2008. It was judged to have been hatched in 2007. The other bird was a female banded in an Otsego County nest in May 2006. The nest is about 10 miles from our bait site.

The 30 carcasses used at this very popular site amounted to almost 2 tons of carrion by mid-February. Most of the carcasses were adult deer but a 400# Jersey steer kept the ravens and eagles fed for 3 days. Most of the meat was removed by the scores of ravens which swarmed the site each day. These big birds will eat quite a bit. They also cache a lot for future use. Ravens could be seen flying to and from the site through the day, carrying away meat and suet.

The most exceptional thing seen at one of our sites was a Northern Goshawk which spent time feeding on multiple days at the Chenango County site. This is the first goshawk ever photographed for the project, which has about 100 sites operating in the eastern U.S. this year.

*Tom Salo*  
*tomsalo@localnet.com*  
 607-965-8232



*Bald Eagles and Common Ravens feeding on carrion in early February, captured on motion-activated camera*

## March Program

### Montezuma Wildlife Refuge – Birding Habitats

On Friday, March 16, Frank Moses, Director of the New York State Audubon Center at Montezuma will be the guest speaker for our monthly program. Frank has been director of the MAC (Montezuma Audubon Center) since October 2006. A graduate of Paul Smith's College, he was a former Development and Outreach Director and graduate of SUNY ESF program. Frank has a long history of involvement as coordinator of a number of educational and nature classroom programs for a variety



of companies culminating in his becoming the Director of an Environmental Education Camp for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

His background was the perfect match for his appointment as the Director of MAC, which houses a large exhibit area, classroom, nature store, office area, auditorium and a meeting room. Frank works closely with school groups throughout the greater Syracuse and Rochester areas and points in between.

This Center is in partnership with the State Department of Environmental Conservation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy and Pheasants Forever. The Montezuma Alliance for the Restoration of Species and Habitat (MARSH) is part of a larger effort to restore, perfect and enhance wildlife habitat on nearly 50,000 acres of Montezuma Wetlands Complex.

Program begins at 7:30pm, at the Elm Park Methodist Church, 401 Elm Street, Oneonta. Free and open to the public and refreshments are served. For further information, contact: Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

*Bufflehead (above), Great Blue Heron (below), Common Snipe (top right) at Montezuma Wildlife Refuge, photos by Dave Kiehm*



### Big Fracas in Oneonta

*Friday, March 2*

Big Fracas Productions is a group of concerned citizens brought together to present a series of performances aimed at raising awareness of the dangers of gas drilling and funds to help defend against it. The events will have material about gas drilling on hand and will feature a variety of upbeat performances.

DOAS is co-sponsoring the Big Fracas Inaugural Benefit Concert at the Oneonta Theatre on Friday, March 2. The concert will feature four local bands and a light show. Doors to the lobby open at 7:00 PM where libations and gas drilling information will be available. The music starts at 8:00 PM.

This is a fun way to support the effort to protect our region from gas drilling. We hope you'll join us!

### Finding birds in winter

Sometimes the dead of winter can often seem to be the death of birding also in central New York, but it doesn't have to be so bad. There's more to be found than just what is at your feeder. The best places I've found to include two seemingly opposite habitats. The first, thick evergreen cover is home for many finches, kinglets and any other bird that needs get out of the wind. The technique of "spishing" will often get them to come in close. If there are fruiting bushes and trees or open water at the edges of a woodlot, robins and bluebirds often will hang out through the winter. The other place I'd look in winter is a large farm where manure is being spread. They are fairly common in New York and often will contain larks and snow buntings, who glean undigested seeds from the manure. There are places which rarely have birds in winter, including frozen wetlands and mature deciduous woods. Wait until spring to look there. The final advice is to do something else in a strong wind or snowstorm. The birds are smart enough to lay low then and we should also.

*Bob Donnelly*

## Upcoming Activities

### March

**March 2 – Big Fracas in Oneonta:** See details page 6.

**March 16 – DOAS Program:** *Montezuma Birding Habitats* by Frank Moses, Director of the New York State Audubon Center at Montezuma. The program will begin at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Refreshments will be served. For more information contact Program Chairman Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

**March 20 – DOAS Board Meeting:** 7 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut St., Oneonta.

**March 24 – Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge Trip:**

This is our annual trip to see Montezuma NWR's big flocks of migrating ducks, snow geese and, if lucky, the Sandhill Cranes. Meet at 7:30 AM in the Dietz Street parking lot across from the YMCA in Oneonta. Participants may also be picked up en route through the Cooperstown area. This trip is all day; dress for the weather, which could be quite cold. Please pack lunch - we break for lunch at the wonderful Audubon Center at Montezuma. For more information contact Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

### April

**April 7 – Lake Otsego Waterfowl Trip:** The annual spring waterfowl trip around Lake Otsego and environs will leave from Cooperstown's Lake Front Docks at the foot of Fair Street at 8 AM sharp. Co-leaders will be Matt Albright, Bob Donnelly and John Davis. Sponsored by the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society for several years, the trip has always attracted many area

birders. Cars will be pooled and radio connected, and the trip will last until around noon. For more information, contact John Davis at davi7js4@hughes.net or (607) 547-9688.

**April 17 – DOAS Board Meeting:** 7 PM location to be decided.

**April 20 – DOAS Program:** *The Everglades - Florida's Jewel* by birders and activists Scott and Denise Stoner. The program will begin at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Refreshments will be served. For more information contact Program Chairman Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

### May

**May 13 – South Hill State Forest Field Trip:** Meet at the Pine Lake parking lot in Davenport at 8:00 AM. For more information contact Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

**May 18 – DOAS Program:** *Photographs of Catskill Songbirds* by Warren Greene. The program will begin at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Refreshments will be served. For more information contact Program Chairman Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

### June

**June 10 – Mountaintop Arboretum (Tannersville) Field Trip:** Meet in Stamford at the Rite-Aid parking lot at 7:30 AM. This will be an all day trip. A stop for lunch is planned. For more information contact Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

**Membership Reminder:** Please check your address on this newsletter for your membership expiration date.

This date is shown by four numbers—the first two digits indicate the year and the second two digits indicate the month, i.e., '1206' is June 2012. See renewal information below—please renew and continue your support of DOAS and our programs.

### 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.**

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## January-February Bird Sightings

The beginning of the new year didn't start with a bang but a whimper as far as winter weather is concerned, yet interesting bird sightings still abound.

The first of the year started with a sighting of 15 Cedar Waxwings in Cooperstown by John Davis and Becky Gretton saw a Golden Eagle in Springfield. On the 2nd Dorian Huneke reported a Red-bellied Woodpecker in Treadwell. That was quite a surprise to me because I also live in Treadwell and have never seen one in my yard. Well, lo and behold, on 2/8 a Red-bellied Woodpecker appeared at my feeder and proceeded to voraciously eat chunks of tasty suet. On 2/4 Kay Crane in Walton saw a Red-winged Blackbird under her feeder. On the 7th she also had 4 Eastern Bluebirds eating berries on a burning bush in



*Cedar Waxwing, by Dave Kiehm*

her yard. That same day Stan Salthe in Deposit saw 2 Brown Creepers come to his feeder area. The feeders hang from a butternut tree that the creepers climb over and over again several times during the day. He has smeared peanut butter on the trunk of this tree. The creepers manage to eat some of it, but most goes to his usual bird visitors. The next day Gerianne Carillo had Purple Finches at her feeder in Milford. A female Ring-necked pheasant was on the ground under Peter Clark's feeders in Cooperstown gobbling up discarded seed from chickadees on 1/9. In Treadwell a Carolina Wren surprised Dorian

Huneke when it landed on a feeder 2 ft. from her head on 1/21. It flew down to a table spread with bird treats, grabbed a peanut and flew off. Edna Straney saw a Northern Shrike in Oneonta on 1/25. The next day John Davis saw a female Northern Goshawk in Cooperstown and

Barbara Marsala had 2 Purple Finches in Otego. On 1/28 Pam Peters watched an adult Bald Eagle fly up from a ditch near the side of the road in Treadwell where it had been feeding on a deer carcass left in the small stream running under the road. Since the end of the month Jennifer Carr has regularly been seeing a pair of Eastern Bluebirds in her yard in Middlefield.

In early February Kathy Dawson watched a male Red-tailed Hawk fly across the road somewhere along the Bainbridge-Guilford route. On the 3rd Gail Dubois had 6 Eastern Bluebirds in Otego. The next day Sandy Bright saw a Great Blue Heron huddled near a fallen tree by a swampy area of the Susquehanna. On 2/8 Kathryn Davino reported that she has been seeing a Rufous-sided Towhee since the fall and it has continued to stay through the winter visiting her yard in Delhi. On 2/12 Tom Whitney had a pair of Purple Finches in Delhi.

If you have bird sightings to report, contact me at [dbenko@frontiernet.net](mailto:dbenko@frontiernet.net), at 6815 Co. Hwy 16, Delhi, NY 13753, or at 607-829-5218 for the next issue of *The Belted Kingfisher*.  
*Dianne Benko*