



# THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

## Coming Activities

### February

February 14-17 – GBBC

February 18 – Board Meeting

February 21 – DOAS Program

### March

March 18 – Board Meeting

March 21 – DOAS Program

### April

April 15 – Board Meeting

April TBD – DOAS Program

### May

May 16 – DOAS Program

May 20 – Board Meeting

### June

Early June – *Birds, Brunch and Beer*

June 20-22 – Adirondack Trip

*More information on page 7*

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

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## Golden Eagle Research

Camera trapping is in full swing. Golden Eagles have appeared at numerous sites – 6 so far. They have been visiting 5 sites with some regularity. However, they have not been as predictable on a daily basis as they have been in recent years. The extreme weather - and dramatic changes in temperature and snow cover - may be affecting their comings and goings. We made our first attempt to trap a Golden Eagle just before this issue went to press. Scott Van Arsdale and I spent 9 hours in a blind on a day that started below zero and ended in single digits. We did not catch the eagle but remain optimistic. There are a lot of them in the region this winter despite the cold. Please watch our web site for any breaking news on our eagle trapping efforts.

*Tom Salo*



Golden Eagle captured by camera trap

## Our Yo-yo Weather

I'll help you remember: cold, snowy weather began early this winter -- here in Morris, Thanksgiving week arrived with 4 inches of snow already on the ground, and by the end of the week the mercury had dipped to near zero. But on December 5th and 6th the daily maximum exceeded 50F, and at night it rained. During the second week of December temperatures were "more seasonal" and snow arrived daily, accumulating to more than a foot. Then temperatures dipped again, to a low of -6F on the 17th. After this it warmed up again (to 62F on December 22nd), cooled a bit over Christmas, then rained heavily on the 29th. Winter storm "Hercules" arrived on January 2nd with 8 inches of snow and frigid temperatures, bottoming at -12F on January 4th. But on the 5th and 6th the daily highs were well above 40F -- and it rained. Then it got cold again, but only for a few days, before temperatures rose again -- to 54F, with rain and a flood watch on the 11th. Yo-yo weather! Or, in the Weather Channel's new household phrase, a "fickle Polar Vortex".

Through it all, the snow has come and gone and come again, with our backyard getting a thorough wash-down during the warm intervals -- and I have been wondering a bit sadly about the fates of all those critters that need a more dependable snow cover to survive the winter. Many small mammals, meadow voles and weasels among them, stay very active at the snow/soil interface, tunneling through this moist, thermally benign habitat in search of food. Even some winter-active insects use this habitat. Other small mammals -- chipmunks, white-footed mice, woodchucks -- burrow deeper and snooze intermittently (or all winter long) in dens well below ground level, snug and dry so long as the snows above don't melt in an unseasonable rain and flood their burrows. Larger mammals like porcupines and bears may den up under fallen logs -- much more comfortable beneath a mantle of snow than without. Cold-blooded vertebrates such as some frog and salamander species undergo complex physiological changes in late fall that enable them to persist in a largely frozen state through the winter; but repeated freezing, thawing and freezing again is a much harder regime for them to survive. Just by being variable, the winter of 2013-14 may be the harshest in years for animals such as these -- and the same is true for many small plants that, in a more stable winter, conserve energy and avoid frost damage, and maybe even grow a little, under a long-lasting cover of snow.

These days, we hear a lot about climate change, and tend to equate it with global warming. But here in upstate New York -- now, today -- the really stressful aspect of climate change for many species is probably excessive variability -- Yo-yo weather!

*Joe Richardson*



*Snowy Owl near Stamford  
photo by Julie Smith*

### THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

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FOUNDED 1968

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Helen McLean

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Field Trips*:	Bob Donnelly
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#### ON THE WEB:

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To contribute notes or articles for

*The Belted Kingfisher*, email:

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

## Conservation and Legislation

**The Governor's Environmental Plans**—NY Governor Andrew Cuomo presented his State of the State address in mid-January and although the environment was not a major focus, he did lay out some proposals worthy of note.

- The Governor plans to invest in 50 public access sites on state lands. This will enhance the ability of outdoor recreationists to use these natural areas.
- He proposed a new biomass heating initiative to transition homes from heating oil to locally sourced sustainably harvested low grade wood. This would reduce use of a fossil fuel, but it is important that the fuel wood be harvested without significant damage to the state's forest resources.
- Also on energy issues, the Governor wants to continue to promote the use of solar power in the state. The existing NY Sun initiative encourages solar panels on schools and other public buildings.
- A major part of the Governor's speech was devoted to ongoing recovery from the super storms of recent years, and improving the ability of the state's infrastructure to withstand future such events. In addition to "hardening" the infrastructure by protecting water treatment plants, the

electric grid, etc., there are proposals to buy out homes in vulnerable areas, restore protective wetlands, and promote natural infrastructure.

- On the down side, Cuomo called for promoting business in the state by removing regulatory barriers. This could result in less environmental review and protection.
- The Governor also proposed expedited review of energy transmission projects that use existing corridors. This may be an issue locally as a new electricity transmission line is planned along the Marcy South line through Delaware and Otsego Counties.

**What you can do**—Tell Gov. Cuomo you support his alternative energy initiatives, and green infrastructure improvements, but do not want to see the environmental review process in the state weakened.

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Executive Chambers  
Albany, NY 12224  
(518) 474-8390

[gov.cuomo@chamber.state.ny.us](mailto:gov.cuomo@chamber.state.ny.us)

*Andy Mason*



*Snowy Owl near Stamford  
photo by Carol Saggese*

## Salvaging What I Can From a Catastrophe

Like something out of a science fiction movie - they're coming! Actually, they're here. The invasive species that threaten our habitats, wildlife and forests.

Emerald Ash Borers (EAB) are one of the worst of the myriad species now damaging our ecosystems. They are in Otsego County. Apparently, they are a boon for woodpeckers because of all those standing trees that remain, dead in the wake of the alien hoard. However, this is little compensation for the loss of multiple species of beautiful and productive hardwoods. Besides being beautiful and commercially valuable, the ash are prolific producers of seeds eaten by birds. They are a great hardwood resource. Baseball bats, tool handles, flooring and furniture are all made from ash.

According to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, about 10% of the timber in Delaware and Otsego Counties is ash. Researchers predict that the number of trees killed by EAB will exceed those lost in the wake of chestnut blight a century ago.

Invasive insects and a warming climate threaten more species than just ash. Hemlock woolly adelgid has been in southern Delaware County since at least 2008. Tragically, it was found in southern Otsego County last year. Maybe the cold spells of this winter will slow its progress north.

It isn't just insects. American beech, butternut and other species are in decline from diseases that were unknown or unnoticeable years ago. Bush honeysuckle, buckthorn, garlic mustard and multiflora rose are just a few of the aggressive invasives infesting my land. They may be on yours too. These plants can form monocultures where they thrive and dominate the native flora

upon which our wildlife depend.

I've been working for years to bring these plant invaders under control. I've done the best with the honeysuckle. It will be many years before I get the others controlled to the same level. I am making progress but there will be no final victory. Dormant seeds

lay in the ground. Seed sources surround me on every side.

But back to the present tragedy – the coming loss of our ash species. I have managed my woodlot for native wildlife and some timber income. This income that wasn't wanted now. It was part of a retirement plan. However, with EABs just miles away and moving fast, I decided to sell the ash timber. I had Amish loggers use horses to limit the impact to the land and forest. They did a reasonably good job.



They were good people.

There are hundreds of smaller ash trees remaining here - thousands if you count the seedlings. There are even some really big trees like one ancient monster that measures 194" in circumference. Once the EABs arrive, there will still be plenty of wood for the woodpeckers.

I don't think I will ever again see white ash trees grow straight and tall like the beautiful 30" trees that were falling in late December. I felt like crying every time I heard a tree fall. It wasn't the loss of any single tree. For me, each crash felt like one more cut in a death by a thousand cuts. I told myself I was just trying to salvage something from a catastrophe. Now, with money in the bank, I mourn. Not for the loss of my trees but for so much more.

*Tom Salo*

### Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)

17th Annual Count



*Evening Grosbeak  
by Dave Kiehm*

The 2014 GBBC will take place February 14– 17.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual 4-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are.

Everyone is welcome—from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Participants tally the number of individual birds of each species they see during their count period. They enter these numbers on the GBBC website. See [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org) for details.

## Hawkwatch Wrapup

The 2013 season at the Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch came to a quiet end on New Years Day, with no raptors recorded on light to moderate westerly winds. This marked the 25th consecutive year of counting at the site.

The season began on August 20, and in between, 674 hours of coverage were put in on 111 days by our team of dedicated counters, including Andy Cooper, Larry Dake, Fred Fries, Becky Gretton, Steve Hall, Andrea Lodovice, Randy Lynch, Andy Mason and Tom Salo.

The total count of 4860 raptors is below the 12 year average of 5335, since full time counting began at the site. This number would have been lower if not for a good count of 1993 Broad-winged Hawks, 40% above the 12 year average. Broad-wings provided two excellent days at the lookout. On Sept. 14, Larry Dake tallied 523; this was followed on Sept. 17 by 916 broad-wings counted by Becky Gretton—breaking the previous high daily count of 900 for the species at Franklin Mt. The day’s total raptor count of 962 birds fell just short of the record of 975 set in Oct., 1990.

The only other positive species was Bald Eagle at 157 birds for the season, just slightly above average. Notably low counts included Osprey, at 49 the lowest count in 17 years; Northern Harrier, 33 birds—down 53% from average; and Red-tailed Hawk, down 23% with 1527 counted.

Golden Eagles came in at a low 129 birds, 29% below average. However, these Franklin Mt. favorites did provide four double-

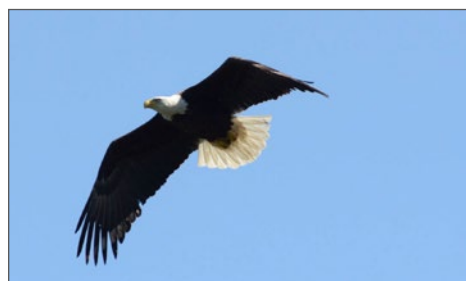
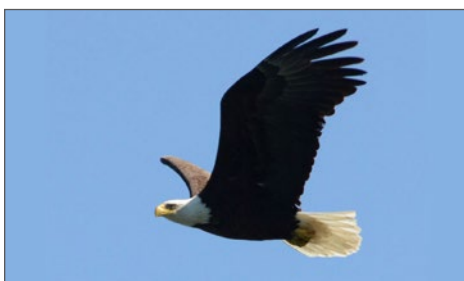
digit days—Nov. 3—16 birds; Nov. 12—11; Nov. 19—15; and an excellent late season flight of 18 on Dec. 7.

Another notable sighting was the second Black Vulture ever at Franklin Mt., spotted on Sept. 16 by Randy Lynch.

Thanks to all who helped out this season, including sharp-eyed spotters and all our visitors.  
*Andy Mason*

### Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch 2013 Season Totals

Black Vulture	1
Turkey Vulture	355
Osprey	49
Bald Eagle	157
No. Harrier	33
Sharp-shinned Hawk	374
Cooper’s Hawk	70
No. Goshawk	7
Red-Shouldered Hawk	35
Broad-winged Hawk	1993
Red-tailed Hawk	1527
Rough-legged Hawk	3
Golden Eagle	124
Am. Kestrel	81
Merlin	16
Peregrine Falcon	10
Unidentified Raptor	25
Total	4860



*Bald Eagles, photos by Dave Kiehm*

**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., ‘1406’ is June 2014. Renewal information is found on page 7 in this issue—please renew and continue your support of DOAS and our programs.

## Eagles in the Rain

The January 11th eagle field trip was warm and wet. Rain and fog did not make for ideal viewing conditions, but nine participants did spot 8 Bald Eagles along the East and West Branches of the Delaware River and Cannonsville Reservoir. Other sightings included Red-tailed Hawks, Belted Kingfishers, Common and Hooded Mergansers and Wild Turkeys.

The intrepid birders rewarded themselves with a good lunch following the trip.

*Andy Mason*



# Upcoming Activities

## February

### February 14-17 – Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)

See details on page 4.

### February 18 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM

**February 21 – Owls of Central New York:** Speaker is Fed von Mechow, former program director at Rogers Environmental Educational Center. Fred has been a birder for 40 years and has participated in the New Jersey Audubon World Series of birding for 20 years, has conducted a route for the USWFS birding survey for 18 years and been a member of the Chenango Bird Club for 25 years.

Fred will present “*Owls of Central New York*”. Fred says several owl species that breed in Central NY and a few others visit regularly or irregularly. We will be treated to his knowledge and expertise on owls from the George Lesser Taxidermy collection housed at Rogers Environmental Education Center. He will discuss the special adaptations owls have to survive in their habitat and niche.

Program is held at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, Chestnut Street, Oneonta New York and begins at 7:30 PM. Refreshments are served and it is free and open to the public. For further information, contact Eleanor Moriarty at 607-435-2054.

## March

### March 18 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM

### March 21 – Everything and More About Bluebirds:

Speaker John Rogers is the Bluebird man, co-founder of the New York State Bluebird Society. His presentation takes him all across the United States although he concentrates on the Eastern half. He has personally fledged 12,000 bluebirds from his numerous boxes. Bluebirds are his life long mission. John’s presentations are lively

and offer excellent information on “*All about Bluebirds and More*”.

Program is held at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, Chestnut Street, Oneonta New York and begins at 7:30 PM. Refreshments are served and it is free and open to the public. For further information, contact Eleanor Moriarty at 607-435-2054.

## April

### April 15 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM

**April – Program:** Tom Salo will present the latest finding of DOAS’s exciting and important Golden Eagle research. Tom will be the guest speaker this year for Audubon New York with these findings. Place and time will be announced in our March newsletter, our web page ([doas.us](http://doas.us)) and on Facebook.

## May

**May 16 – Program:** Larry Federman, well known bird expert, Education Coordinator for Audubon New York at the Rheinstrom Hill Audubon Center and the Buttercup Farm Audubon. Larry’s program will be his expertise on dragonflies.

### May 20 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM

## June

**Early June – Birds, Brunch and Beer:** Look for details in upcoming issues for the Second Annual Birds, Brunch and Beer event at the Ommegang Brewery in Cooperstown.

**June 20-22 – Adirondack Boreal Birding Trip:** This trip will be limited to 15 people, and will be led by an expert birding guide. Trip will not involve hiking but limited walking. Trip details and reservation form on page 6.

## 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; family memberships \$20 annually or \$30 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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Support DOAS education and conservation programs with an additional donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_



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## January Bird Sightings

The roller coaster weather seems to have put a damper on bird sightings this month. While not many reports have rolled in, many birds of note have been winter visitors, with one anomaly. Andy Mason reported a sizeable flock of Robins in his yard on 1/14, some foraging in his crabapple trees. Dorian Huneke found one in Treadwell the next day, a first for her in January.

Snowy Owls have invaded the Northeast in relatively large numbers this year.



*Snowy Owls near Cooperstown  
on 12/30 and 1/1, photos by Abby Rodd*

In December, Steve Hall reported 3 in Fairfield. Randy Lynch reported one in Stamford, and Becky Gretton has found 2 near Cooperstown. On 1/7, Becky, Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright found one of these owls, and were soon joined by Andi Lyons and Abby Rodd, who provided some of the pictures for this month's newsletter. Also in the area that day were 2 other species visiting from the north country: a large flock of Horned Larks and Snow Buntings foraging near the road, a few spilling out into the roadway to do some gritting. A bit farther afield, on 1/4 Rod Carter reported a Snowy near his winter retreat in Florida!

In early January, Dorian Huneke noted an unusual lack of owl activity in her area; on the 10th, Becky Gretton listened to two Great Horned Owls conversing in the town of Springfield.

Leslie Preston got a bonus when she took a side trip to the lake on a trip to the dentist in Cooperstown on 1/14, finding 2 pairs of Hooded Mergansers, a Mallard, 2 Ring-necked Ducks, and a Gadwall. Near the Farmer's Museum, a field seemed alive

with motion; she discovered dozens more Mallards foraging among the corn stalks, and more in a pond nearby. On 1/16, Charlie Scheim observed two Redtails feeding on a deer carcass on the frozen swamp near Gilbert Lake.

The weekend of January 19th was a weekend for eagles. Angelika Mahnert Rashkow reported 2 flying right above her in Hartwick. Becky Gretton reported a Golden at her bait pile. Dorian Huneke watched two juvenile Golden Eagles, one distinctly larger than the other, soaring overhead near Treadwell, circling slowly, sometimes seeming to spar with each other, diving, rolling over with talons raised in apparent mock battle, since they then continuing to soar lazily along together.

Finding drinking water can be a challenge for birds in winter, with many sources frozen over. During the period when the Polar Vortex was settled over our area, it was rewarding to see some Goldfinches drinking from our heated bird bath. Even common birds can bring great pleasure!

*Sandy Bright*