



# THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

## Coming Activities

### January

January 2– Fort Plain Bird Count  
January 9– Eagle Trip  
January 15– Program: Rick Bunting, Birder & Photographer  
January 17– Waterfowl Count  
January 19– DOAS Board Mtg

### February

February 6+/- – Golden Eagle Survey  
February 12-15– Great Backyard Bird Count 2016  
February 19– Program :Wells Horton, Photographer

### March

March 1– DOAS Board Mtg

**More information on page 7**

**DOAS programs are free & open to the public**

## Birds, Bats, and Bees-- and the Pesticides that Kill

New research has determined that widely used insecticides—neonicotinoids or “neonics”—have begun to threaten all food production! How is this possible? Aren’t insecticides used for the purpose of protecting crops from insect invasions? Yes, but the side effects of these nerve agents have serious consequences, killing bees and hundreds of species of insects that are food for birds and bats and many other creatures. With uncountable species of insects being wiped out, it follows that there is an impact not only on birds, bats, and bees, but on land creatures such as shrews, hedgehogs, possums, skunks, and countless others. According to several studies, 95% of neonics applied to crops end up in the wider environment, killing insects that birds and bats rely on for food, particularly during their most vulnerable time when they are raising their young.

Researchers from Radboud University in the Netherlands explored reasons for bird declines from 2003 to 2010: possible reasons under



*“Bumble Bee (4489853775)” by Tony Hisgett from Birmingham, UK Wikimedia Commons*

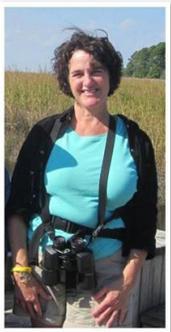
investigation were habitat destruction, intensification of farming, and a high pollution of the neonic known as imidacloprid. It was discovered that water pollution levels “of just 20 nanograms of neonicotinoid per litre led to a 30% fall in bird numbers over 10 years....” Similar studies are now underway around the globe as it becomes more understood that wildlife in many countries is suffering similar harm from toxic pesticides.

The mysterious collapse of honeybee colonies has been in the news for a few years now; some of the problem has been attributed to a new breed of mites found on many bees; but pesticides are the other cause: a survey of about 5,000 beekeepers reported losing 42 % of their bee

**“Bees” Continued on page 6**

*President's Message***Thank you and best wishes, Dianne!**

As an Audubon group, birds are of course our primary focus, and for the last nearly 20 years we have been most fortunate to have Dianne Benko write the Bird Sightings column for The Belted Kingfisher. I see a number of newsletters from other bird clubs and Audubon Chapters around the state, and I cannot think of one that has had such a long-tenured reporter for bird records as Dianne. Her columns were always cheery and readable and she managed to get everyone's sightings in—even in the busy spring season.



**Dianne  
Benko**

Dianne was an active birder herself, and helped with the last Breeding Bird Atlas and was a regular participant on the Oneonta Christmas Bird Count along with her husband Gerry Cahill. Dianne and Gerry are good friends of my wife Gray and me, and we took a number of trips together with birding as the major component, including Cape May, Florida, Texas, and this fall to the Outer Banks of North Carolina. To say Dianne is fun-loving is an understatement!

She and Gerry—both teachers at South Kortright Central School—had plans for some time to retire to San Diego, and this fall it finally came to pass. Dianne and I have had a semi-serious life list competition for years, and at the moment I am slightly ahead. But with her moving to one of the best birding locales on the continent, I know I am doomed to second place!

We thank Dianne for her years of dedicated service to DOAS and her talents as a writer. We wish her and Gerry a wonderful retirement in their new home and many more birding adventures!

*Andy Mason*

**Eagle Trip Scheduled for January 9th**

This winter's eagle field trip is scheduled for Saturday, January 9, 2016. The outing 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 also. We 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 8:00 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](mailto:AndyMason@earthling.net).

**THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO  
AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
FOUNDED 1968

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Janet Potter

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To contribute notes or articles for  
The Belted Kingfisher, email:  
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## Conservation and Legislation

### NY Environmental Scorecard Released—

EPL/Environmental Advocates, New York's premier environmental advocacy group, has released its 2015 Environmental Scorecard, which rates state leaders and legislators on their performance over the past year. The scorecard uses bill sponsorship and votes on important issues to tally a rating for each legislator.

Among the legislation used on the scorecard was a measure to close the hazardous waste loophole that allows waste from oil and gas drilling to avoid handling and disposal regulations that apply to other hazardous waste. Another would have established limits on greenhouse gas emissions from major sources in the state. A third bill would protect children from hazardous pesticides by restricting their use on playgrounds and sports fields at day and overnight camps. Unfortunately, all of these, and other good legislation, died—usually without a floor vote.

The 2015 Scorecard is little changed from previous years in regard to both our local legislators. State Senator James Seward had the lowest Senate score with 44 out of a high of 100. His poor performance was matched by that of Sen. John Bonacic. Both of these legislators have long records of bottling up and opposing positive environmental legislation. On the Assembly side, Clifford Crouch had a score of 57, William Magee, a 78, and Peter Lopez, a 67. The scorecard also calls out particularly good and bad legislators. This year's 'Oil Slick Awards' went to Sen. John DeFrancisco of Syracuse who has denied climate science and used his position to block advances in clean energy, and to Sen. Majority Leader Dean Skelos—now on trial for corruption—who blocked votes due to possible business benefits for his family. Legislator of the Year is Sen. Brad Hoylman of Manhattan, who as ranking member of the Environmental Conservation Committee, championed the bills mentioned above, and others that would help improve the state's air, lands and water.

For the full 2015 Environmental Scorecard, visit [www.eplscorecard.org](http://www.eplscorecard.org).

**Global Warming in Paris—and at home—**The eyes 3

of the world were recently on the climate conference in Paris, where world leaders convened to work out agreements

to reduce carbon emissions that threaten to accelerate climate change and associated environmental damage. At this writing, there was no concrete course of action, but observers were optimistic that this threat has finally become a priority for enough nations that progress would be made—even if not to the degree truly necessary to address rising temperatures.

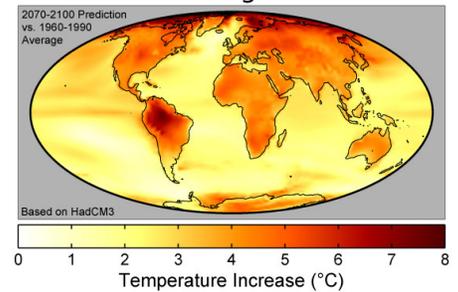
Incredibly though, as a plan was being hammered out in Paris, our own Congress voted to halt plans to cut carbon emissions from the nation's power plants—a major source of greenhouse gases. The timing of the vote was an obvious slap at President Obama and negotiators at the climate conference. Fortunately it has no chance of becoming law, but it displayed the lack of concern for this critical issue many legislators have.

One of the votes against cleaning up power plants came from local Representative Chris Gibson. This was a classic flip-flop, as he had previously supported this effort. It is unfortunate that Rep. Gibson folded to Republican party pressure to change his position. On the positive side, Rep. Richard Hanna of Utica bucked this pressure and voted against the bill, one of only two Republicans to do so.

**What you can do**—Contact your Representative, be it Gibson or Hanna, and let them know your sentiments on their approach to climate change. With the rest of the world working toward a solution, it is important that the United States lead the way, as the biggest contributor to carbon emissions.

**US House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515; [gibson.house.gov/contact/](http://gibson.house.gov/contact/); <http://hannaforms.house.gov/contact/>.**

### Global Warming Predictions



## January 15th DOAS Program Rick Bunting--Favorite Photos of 2015



*Rick Bunting*

Rick Bunting, well known local photographer will be our presenter for the January monthly meeting. His photos of birds, insects and other natural subjects have brought him a large following of fans who enjoy his daily postings online and his personal presentations. Since his retirement from SUNY Potsdam and The Crane School of Music, Rick pursues his passion for photography full time. Also an accomplished and well-known musician, Rick pursues his passion for photography wherever he travels, and will share his favorite images of the past year. The program will take place on Friday, January 15th at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut St., Oneonta, NY at 7:30PM.

DOAS Programs are free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

### SHE'S BAAAAACK!

The world's oldest known seabird has returned to Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced last month that the female Laysan Albatross named Wisdom was spotted at the remote island on 19 November.

We have reported on Wisdom previously, including on March 2013, when one of her chicks was observed pecking its way out of an egg.

Wisdom has been a banded bird since 1956. The much-respected ornithologist, Chan Robbins, first put a band on Wisdom in December of that year, and multiple bands, each significantly worn away by time, the sea, and the sea air, have been replaced multiple times. Wisdom is estimated to be at least 64 years old, but she could actually be older.

Laysan Albatrosses typically mate for life, but Wisdom has likely had more than one mate. She

has raised as many as 26 chicks over her lifetime. Breeding albatrosses and their mates will often spend about half the year rearing and feeding their young. They will forage hundreds of miles out at sea for squid, flying-fish eggs, and other yummy morsels.



*"Wisdom" Wikipedia photo*

Midway Atoll NWR is about 1,200

miles northwest of Honolulu. It is also part of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. And, by the way, Chan Robbins, the ornithologist who first banded Wisdom, is also still with us, at 97 years of age

The Birding Community E-bulletin ([www.refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/](http://www.refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/))

### Hawkwatch News

The season is winding down at the Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch in early December, as species variety dwindles, with Red-tailed Hawks and Golden and Bald Eagles making up the count most days. Other late-season birds making an appearance include Northern Goshawks, Red-shouldered Hawks and Rough-legged Hawks.

At this time of year, the good northwest winds we look for to bring raptors also bring lake-effect snow, making visibility difficult at times and conditions

harsh for the counters. However, Dec. has brought double-digit Golden days on occasion, and we will continue counting on promising days through the end of the month.

As of the first week of December, the season total stood at 4288 birds—about 1000 below the 12 year average. A full season wrap up will appear in next month's newsletter.

*Andy Mason*

## Christmas Bird Count 2015

Our 47th annual CBC took place on what turned out to be the first real wintery day of the season. Though there were few snow flurries, the suddenly-cold temperatures and biting wind made for a rather rugged experience. The birds apparently didn't like the wind any more than we humans did - Charlie and I were nearly 6 hours into our count before finding our first Mourning Dove! - and numbers were down overall. Some sunshine, persistence, and interesting finds made the day more pleasant and successful than it might otherwise have been.

Peter Fauth found a mature Golden Eagle on a carcass, and subsequently observed it in flight and

perched in a tree. Bob Donnelly located a pair of Long-eared Owls, one of them vocalizing "like a nuthatch on steroids". He and Dave and Ann Kiehm found five immature Bald Eagles in a single tree, with the added bonus of an adult flying overhead. That group also reported our first ever (for the CBC) Greater Scaup and Common Goldeneye, while Randy and Carol Lynch discovered a Rusty Blackbird, the first seen in our CBC since 1976. Complete results will be reported in the February Kingfisher.

*Sandy Bright*

## November-December Bird Sightings continued from page 8

The first of November brought Fox Sparrows and a flock of Cedar Waxwings to the Hawkwatch

at Franklin Mountain (Andy Mason), and a juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk hunting birds in Kathryn Davino's yard in Meredith. The hawk relentlessly – and unsuccessfully - chased Blue

Jays, squirrels, and even a Hairy Woodpecker, while smaller prey birds stayed out of sight. In mid-November, Linda Pearce reported the first Pine Siskin of the season.

We ended November with visitors from the north and the south. Dave Kiehm observed a Northern Shrike making two unsuccessful sorties on his studio feeders. Becky Gretton reported not only a Bald Eagle and 4 Ravens, but also 2 Black Vultures in Springfield, a very unusual species this far north! Here's hoping we continue to find a nice mix of birds to brighten our days as they get shorter and colder.

*Sandy Bright*



*Sharp-shinned Hawk - photo by Kathryn Davino*

***If you have bird sightings to report, contact our new "Sightings" editor, Sandy Bright, brights@hartwick.edu, at 40 Fair St., Oneonta, NY 13820, or at 607 287-4465 for the next issue of The Belted Kingfisher.***

**Join the DOAS Bird Friendly Coffee Club, Support the programs of DOAS and protect bird habitats** Preorder your coffee monthly and pick it up at member meetings. Contact Susan O'Handley at (607) 643-5680 or email [sjohandley@gmail.com](mailto:sjohandley@gmail.com) for more information and to sign up.

## “Bees” Continued from page 1

colonies last year, during the spring and summer when bee colonies are at their strongest, but a time when farmlands are being sprayed with bee-toxic pesticides. In fact as many as 200 million acres of American farmland, covered in crops such as corn and soy, are treated with toxic pesticides. Pesticide companies such as Bayer and Syngenta have even lobbied the EPA to allow them to use more and more neonics on crops! Bayer, one of the world’s largest manufacturers of neonics, filed a lawsuit against Friends of the Earth Germany, in order to keep neonics on the shelves and on the world market. Bayer has also spent millions lobbying the Obama administration to allow without restriction the continued selling of neonics in the U.S. while at the same time trying to bury the science which demonstrates how dangerous neonics are for our planet. Large garden retailers such as True Value and Ace have not yet made any commitments to taking toxic pesticides off their shelves. However, Lowes,

Home Depot and some other retailers have begun to take action on neonic pesticides.

In the EU some neonics are no longer used on bee-attractive crops, thanks in part to a successful campaign by Greenpeace



which organized millions across Europe to pressure the EU to impose a partial ban on certain neonics. This should be a wake-up call to the U.S. But sadly, here chemicals are deemed innocent until proven deadly to our environment. Our own EPA has recently issued an “unconditional” approval of a new subgroup of neonics called sulfoxaflor made by Dow Agrosience. The EPA is now being sued by Earthjustice. Ironically, The EPA studies find the new chemicals highly toxic, but the agency argues that the risk is worth it!

The risk is death to many pollinators such as bees, birds, and bats, but may be deadly to humans as well: these toxic pesticides remain in the soil and plants for months and even years. Neonics are systemic pesticides, meaning “they permeate the entire plant, including the pollen, nectar and dew” that bees, bats, and hummingbirds, for example, eat. And as the pesticides are systemic, they can’t be washed off—which makes one wonder how safe these products are for humans!

Birds, bats, and bees are “the canaries in the coal mine”, warning us of an imminent threat to our environment and our food supply. You can help save these and other endangered species by supporting Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Bat Conservation International, Center for Biological Diversity, NRDC, or any other environmental organization of your choosing.

*Stephen Rice*

## Looking Ahead- February 19th Program

Wells Horton is a Central New York landscape photographer. At Age 13, Wells said when he retired he would pursue landscape photography. Having lived in various areas within the State, he has spent the past thirty plus years in the Sherburne area. New York State offers so many photographic opportunities from Orient and Montauk Points to the Catskills, Adirondacks, Hudson Valley, Finger Lake, and Central and Western New York. Mixing color, light, and weather, Wells captures the State’s landscapes that have a feel of water colors. Wells conducts various photography workshops. His photographic work can be seen at <http://wells-horton.smugmug.com>. The program will take place on February 19th at 7:30PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut St., Oneonta, NY.



Barred Owl in the Adirondacks  
Image by Wells Horton

# Upcoming Activities

## January

**January 2 – Fort Plain Christmas Bird Count :** All are welcome to participate regardless of birding experience. There will be a potluck after the count. For information contact Bob Donnelly: [rsdonn@yahoo.com](mailto:rsdonn@yahoo.com) or 607-264-8156

**January 9– DOAS Eagle Trip:** Field trip to view wintering bald eagles in Delaware County. Depart from the Dietz St. parking lot across from the YMCA in Oneonta at 8:30AM. Participants can be picked up en route in Delhi and Walton. For further information, contact Andy Mason, (607) 652-2162, [AndyMason@earthling.net](mailto:AndyMason@earthling.net).

**January 15– DOAS Public Program:** Rick Bunting, well known local photographer will present his amazing photos. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. For more information contact Susan O’Handley at (607) 643-5680 or email [sjohandley@gmail.com](mailto:sjohandley@gmail.com).

**January 17– Waterfowl Count:** NY State Ornithological Association’s annual statewide waterfowl count. 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. Contact Andy Mason, (607) 652-2162, [AndyMason@earthling.net](mailto:AndyMason@earthling.net)

**January 19– DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 PM

## February

**February 6 (weather permitting) – Delaware County Raptor Count :** The target day will be Saturday February 6, 2016 with a four day window to work around possible bad weather - If you would like to participate, contact Tom Salo at [salothomas@gmail.com](mailto:salothomas@gmail.com) or 607-965-8232

**February 12 - 15–Great Backyard Bird Count 2016:**

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org).

**February 19– DOAS Public Program:** Wells Horton will present photos of landscapes and wildlife from New York State. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. For more information contact Susan O’Handley at (607) 643-5680 or email [sjohandley@gmail.com](mailto:sjohandley@gmail.com).

## March

**March 1– DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 PM



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

## 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.

Memberships can also be purchased online at <http://doas.us>.

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



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## November-December Bird Sightings

Recalling my own sightings of the past weeks, I'm struck by how finding birds can be as much about luck as it is about persistence. In November, during an early morning run through Neawha Park, I stumbled upon a Great Blue Heron and 3 Bald Eagles, the eagles interacting over I-88, the heron flying under, through a culvert. I was just at the right place at the right time.

Sometimes that "right place" is our own back yard, as it was for Gloria Mravlja in Worcester, who found, among a flock of Juncos, a strikingly white bird with dark wing tips. She was able to get some photos of the bird, a partial leucistic Junco. Kay Crane had a similar experience in Walton when she found a Common Grackle in her yard with a partly white head on 11/4. She also enjoyed watching a Red-bellied Woodpecker and 2 pairs of Tufted Titmice.

Fall is certainly a good time of year to find Bald Eagles. On 10/24, Dorian and Eric Huneke watched a Red-tailed Hawk dive-bomb an eagle in Treadwell for several minutes. The next day brought several reports:

a juvenile in Oneonta (Charlie Scheim), a juvenile and an adult in Cooperstown (Leslie Preston), and 5 Balds inside a woodlot in Burlington (Tom Salo). Tom watched the aggressive interaction between some of the eagles, and suspected a bow hunter had lost a deer. Leslie found 2 more eagles at Wilber Lake on November 3rd, along with a Red-tailed Hawk and Red-breasted Nuthatch. The next day both Dorian and Charlie ogled low-flying eagles in Treadwell and Oneonta, respectively.

By late October, it can be a real treat to hear birds sing. Dorian Huneke reported lots of bird activity, including a Red-winged Blackbird singing as if it were spring. Fall also brings the arrival of different birds to our feeders as breeding season slips away. Becky Gretton (Cooperstown) was pleased to see lots of House Finches arrive to take advantage of her offerings.

Canadarago Lake provided some nice sightings for Tom Salo and Becky Gretton (10/31), including Long-tailed Ducks, Lesser and Greater Scaup, Common Mergansers, and one Osprey. A dark-phase Rough-legged Hawk was seen by Randy Lynch in Harpersfield.

**Continued on page 5**