

# Coming Activities

### **February**

2/15 DOAS Board Meeting 7PM, Elm Park Methodist Church 2/18 Program: The New York State Kestrel Project 2/18-21 Great Backyard Bird Count 2/26 Owl Field Trip

### March

3/15 DOAS Board Meeting 7PM, Elm Park Methodist Church 3/18 Program: The Golden Eagle Winter Project

### **April**

4/3 Annual spring waterfowl trip 4/15 Program: Catskill Black Bears

### May

5/20 Birds of Costa Rica

More information on page 7

All DOAS programs are free and open to the public

### **Eagle Trip Report**

The thermometer read below zero when this year's eagle trip left Oneonta the morning of Jan. 15. It didn't rise much the rest of the day and snow was in the air most of the time. The weather didn't dampen the spirits of the 20 participants, however.

The first Bald Eagle spotted by some of the group was in Delhi, but not everyone

got to view it. We pushed on through Walton without any more eagles, although a couple of Redtailed Hawks were sighted. The first good view of an eagle came along Cannonsville Reservoir, as an immature Bald Eagle fed with several Ravens on a deer carcass on the ice. The

reservoir was completely frozen, so not productive for eagles beyond this.

However, things improved considerably when the group reached the Cannonsville dam, near Deposit. Nine eagles were seen soaring over the dam and river below, no doubt attracted by the open water and fish passing through the dam

outlet. The river also provided views of many waterfowl, including Canada Geese, Mallards, Black Ducks, Common and Hooded Mergansers, and a pair of goldeneyes.

Moving down through the village of Deposit, several more eagles were spotted, including a pair sitting side by side near a nest. Driving down Rte. 17 a

> soaring bird was spotted near Fishs Eddy. A quick exit was made, but the bird was not in view for long. However, Randy Lynch thought the bird was a Golden Eagle, and a couple of photos taken by Dave Kiehm later confirmed this.

More eagles were present along the E. Branch of the

Delaware and when the group reached Downsville and saw the last bird perched below the Pepacton dam, the total for the day was over 30 Bald Eagles. Some of the group enjoyed a pleasant lunch in Downsville before returning to Oneonta. All in all, a cold but good day of birding!





Dave and Maggie

### President's Message

## A Winter's Reprieve (though too short)

Winter already seems like it has stretched on for six months. I do get out with Maggie for a walk to the pond each day but to Maggie's regret, I don't venture out much more.

One day I look forward to each winter is our annual eagle trip. Seeing large numbers of eagles is one of the few reasons I will brave the elements. This year's trip started out with 8 below zero temps. I could only hope this would improve. After gathering up all the other

participants, we headed south along the Delaware River. The river was frozen for much of the way until we reached the dam at Cannonsville Reservoir. Being the first open water for miles, the eagles were there in numbers. At one point 10+ eagles were in the air at one time.

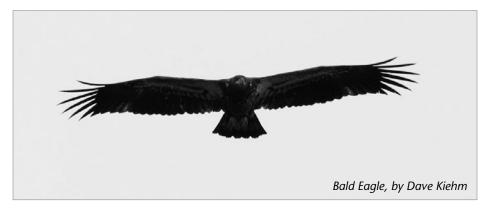
As we traveled down the river we watched scores of waterfowl and the eagle sightings from that point were very frequent. Everyone had great looks at mature and immature birds.

After seeing many more ducks and eagles we stopped for a nice lunch. The day complete, I made it back to Milford by late afternoon. After thawing out and downloading photos taken from the trip, I was very surprised to see that one of our "immature" bald eagles turned out to be a golden eagle! A very rare find!

We ended up seeing 30+ eagles and everyone had a great day. Even this "winter hater" will brave all that is nasty outside to see eagles in those numbers. Another day I will brave is the upcoming owl trip led by Bob Donnelly. There seem to be more owls around this year so hopes are high that we will get to see some of these beautiful birds. Please check our web site for dates and times and don't forget, dress warm!

On the subject of field trips, we are putting together our spring schedule of walks. We would like to offer as many walks as possible. If you are interested in leading a walk, please contact any board member. Let us know where you would like to walk and we will advertise location and date. Please consider sharing one of your favorite birding or flower spots with our members.

Dave 607 286 9222 kiehm@oechlue.com



### THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY FOUNDED 1968

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Helen McLean

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editor@doas.us

Cover Artwork by Dave Kiehm

### **Conservation and Legislation**

by Andy Mason

Changes in Albany—The new regime has taken over in Albany, with Gov. Andrew Cuomo's inauguration and his State of the State speech in early January. The governor's approach to the environment is still largely unknown, but his appointment of Joe Martens as Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation has drawn a positive response. Martens served in Mario Cuomo's administration and had a hand in drafting and enacting some of the state's important environmental laws. Most recently he was president of the Open Space Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to land preservation that often served as an interim owner of lands purchased from private interests then sold to the state.

The next environmental test for the new governor will be his budget proposal, and particularly his treatment of the Environmental Protection Fund. This is the primary source of monies for land preservation, clean air and water programs, recycling initiatives, and numerous other state efforts that keep NY green. The EPF is funded from a real estate transfer tax that generates between \$500 million and \$1 billion dollars annually. The fund should receive \$200+ million, but has regularly been raided for other purposes and to help balance the state budget. Over \$500 million has been misappropriated from the EPF in the past 7 years.

With the state's poor fiscal outlook, the governor and legislature can be expected to again tap the EPF for non-environmental programs. In addition, staff cuts to agencies such as DEC and state parks have been disproportionate to other departments and may again bear the brunt of layoffs.

Without an outcry from those who recognize the need to keep NY's environment a top priority—including Auduboners—the EPF will suffer again this year. A coalition of environmental

groups is urging the governor to fund the EPF at \$222 million, to provide for the critical programs that have been slashed in recent years.

What you can do—More information on the EPF and its benefits and history is available at www.keepprotectingny.org. There is also a link to let Gov. Cuomo know how important the fund is and urge him to provide adequate resources. You can also write the governor (address below) to make sure he knows NYers care about the environment, and that the EPF needs \$220 million to fulfill its purpose. Since the legislature will also have to approve a final budget, including the EPF, send a copy to your State Senator and Assemblymember.

#### **Addresses:**

Gov. Andrew Cuomo The Capitol Albany, NY 12224 (518) 474-8390 www.governor.ny.gov

#### **State Senate**

State Sens. James Seward/John Bonacic NY State Senate Albany, NY 12247 Seward—(518) 455-3131 seward@senate.state.ny.us Bonacic—(518) 455-3181 bonacic@senate.state.ny.us

#### **State Assembly**

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

Albany, NY 12248

Magee—(518) 455-4807 mageew@assembly.state.ny.us Crouch—(518) 455-5741 crouchc@assembly.state.ny.us Lopez—(518) 455-5363 lopezp@assembly.state.ny.us

### Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society Environmental Education Grants

Every school year, during the spring semester, Environmental Education Grants are made available to classroom teachers in the DOAS area (Delaware, Otsego, eastern Chenango, and western Schoharie Counties). These grants enable teachers to add new environmental education activities to the curriculum. The grants are competitive, with a maximum award amount of \$250. Previous grants have funded projects such as an

environmental field day; construction of a weather station; backyard birds study kit; and pond studies.

The deadline for grant submission is February 18, 2011. For more information or for application forms, see the Education Committee page of the DOAS web site, http://www.doas.us or contact Barbara Marsala at barbaramars@stny.rr.com

Barbara Marsala

### **Waterfowl Count Results**

**Totals:** 

In mid-January, DOAS surveyed local lakes and rivers as part of the NY State Ornithological Assoc.'s annual waterfowl count. Areas covered include: W. Branch Delaware R. Delhi to Deposit; Cannonsville Res.; Otsego Lake and tributaries and surrounding ponds; Susquehanna R., Portlandville to Unadilla, including Goodyear Lake; Ouleout Cr. including East Sidney Lake; Buckhorn Lake; Unadilla River and tributaries, Leonardsville to Sidney; Wharton Cr.; Butternut Cr.

Thanks to participants Matt Albright, Kay Crane, John Davis, Bob Donnelly, Kathleen Griswold, Eric Knight, Kathy Mario, Andy Mason, Ed McGittigan, Meredith & Paul Hudson, Eleanor Moriarty, Bob Miller, Katie Ray, Tom and Joann Salo, Cynthia Waterman.

#### Mute Swan 2 Am. Black Duck 57 Com. Goldeneye 2 American Coot 41 Canada Goose 813 Mallard/Black Duck hybrid 1 Hooded Merganser 21 Mallard 511 Northern Pintail 1 Com. Merganser 95 **Total** 1544

### Lead, Rat Poison and Raptors

Raptors are vulnerable to many dangers. In the past they were legally shot and intentionally poisoned. They suffer from toxic substances in the food chain. Cars, power lines, windows, fishing line and lures, wind turbines, and farming practices all kill birds of prey. Recent information has made us aware of other dangers. One of these – the use of lead in hunting and fishing gear – is an old problem that has been mostly ignored, at least in how it affects raptors. The other concern is a new class of highly toxic rat poison.

Lead is a cheap but toxic metal that has been used for years in many applications. Its removal from new plumbing applications greatly reduced human exposure. A conference conducted by The Peregrine Fund in 2008 provided a wealth of information on how the use of lead bullets exposes both humans and scavengers to lead (http://www.peregrinefund.org/lead\_conference/). Recently, I submitted a request to NYSDEC for information on lead poisoning of scavengers, especially wanting information on raptors. My Freedom of Information Law request resulted in the release of a spreadsheet and memo detailing birds that the DEC Wildlife Pathology Lab determined died from lead poisoning. A large number of Canada Geese were poisoned by consuming bird shot. The second and third species in number of deaths were Common Loon and Bald Eagle respectively. Most of these loons contained lead fishing gear, and most of that fishing gear is still legally sold in New York.

It is more difficult to determine the exact cause of the eagle deaths. Bald Eagles, like other raptors, expel the undigested parts of their food in a pellet. It is assumed that these New

York eagles consumed the lead from prey or carcasses they scavenged. A paper submitted at the Peregrine Fund Conference by researchers from the University of Minnesota established a link between eagle poisonings and copper jacketed lead bullets used for deer hunting. The MN researchers examined four "epidemiological parameters" and determined "they significantly reduce the validity of any other possible explanations other than ammunition of lead exposure" in the deaths of the examined eagles. Send a request to tomsalo@localnet.com if you would like to see the NYSDEC documents.

As with all things, we are making "progress" in the development of rat poisons. It used to be that commonly used poisons such as Warfarin required rats to feed multiple times over several days. New poisons now only require one dose. However, the rat may survive for up to 5 days before it dies. During this time the poisoned rat is impaired and easy prey for raptors and other predators. These poisons are showing up in many species. Studies in North America and Europe found mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, foxes, skunks, deer, squirrels, possums, raccoons, Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, owls, hawks and vultures all victims of these poisons.

New regulations require the poisons to be sold in bait "stations" intended to keep out kids and pets. This does nothing to protect predators from being killed or impaired by secondary poisoning. Brand names include Havoc, Talon, Contrac, Maki, Ratimus and d-CON Mouse Pruf II.

Tom Salo

### **Hawkwatch News**

The 2010 Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch season wrapped up on Jan. 3, with no birds recorded on light W-NW winds. A total of 6304 raptors were counted in 115 days from Aug. 24 through Jan. 3. This marked the third highest total in the 22-year history of the lookout. New seasonal records were set for Bald Eagle and Broadwinged Hawk. Another high spot was the first Swainson's Hawk seen at Franklin Mt., spotted by Steve Hall on Oct. 27-details have been submitted to the NY State Avian Records Committee.

This was the second straight record year for broad-wings, which are usually the most numerous species at eastern US hawk watches. Franklin Mt. has never experienced big numbers of broad-wings, but they have now favored us two years in a row. The excellent Bald Eagle count continues an ongoing population rebound for this formerly endangered species. It also parallels high counts at other hawk lookouts this year.

However, most other species were below the 10-year average since full-time counting began at Franklin Mt. All three falcons—kestrel, merlin and peregrine—were significantly down from the 10-year average since full-time counting began at the site. The same was true for the three accipiter species. Red-tailed Hawks were down by 8%, but most disappointing was a very low year for Golden Eagles. Only 93 were tallied, half the 10-year average of 181. No clear reason is apparent for this drop, as other hawk watches that get significant counts of goldens were near normal. However lake effect snow reducing visibility and altering migration routes late in the season could have been a factor at Franklin Mt.

The only other species on the plus side were Turkey Vultures, up 168%, and Red-shouldered Hawks, which showed a slight increase over the average.

Once again, a dedicated crew of counters and spotters put in long hours and great effort. As usual, special recognition must go to Steve Hall who counted over half the hours at the site this season. Steve reached a personal milestone this year, tallying his 500th

Golden Eagle at Franklin Mt. There are very few individuals who have surpassed that number in the eastern U.S.

Larry Dake, Fred Fries, Becky Gretton, Marilyn Leahy, Randy Lynch, Andy Mason, Ron Milliken, Fred Reckner and Tom Salo all contributed days and hours counting. In addition important help with spotting came from Richard Hendrick, Andrea Lodovice, Ralph Niederlander, Bob Shultis, and many others. Thanks to all for their good work!

Daily and seasonal totals for Franklin Mt. are available at www.hawkcount.org

Andy Mason



Broad-wing hawk, by Dave Kiehm

### **DOAS Membership Application**

Membership in the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society includes 9 issues of our newsletter, *The Belted Kingfisher*. Cost is \$15 annually or \$25 for two years. Please make your check payable to "DOAS" and mail payment with this form to: DOAS Membership Chair, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544.

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

Name:	Phone:
Address:	
Email:	

#### Favorite Places Series

### The Catskill Scenic Trail

One of my favorite birding spots in the region is the Catskill Scenic Trail in northern Delaware County. Stretching for 26 miles along an old railbed from Bloomville to Roxbury, this nearly flat trail is flanked by hedgerows that are home to Baltimore orioles, gray catbirds, common yellowthroats, song sparrows and numerous other species in spring and summer. Beyond the trail itself, meadows and pastures provide sight and song of bobolinks, eastern meadowlarks, red-winged



Sapsucker, by Dave Kiehm

blackbirds, savannah sparrows and other open country birds.

A fall hike or winter ski along the CST will turn up chickadees, slate-colored juncos, northern cardinals, and woodpeckers as well as a chance of spotting a red-tailed hawk or northern harrier over the open areas. Some winters, snow buntings and horned larks feed in manured fields or corn stubble.

Between Stamford and Grand Gorge, the trail passes Mayham's Pond, often a resting spot for waterfowl such as common mergansers, ring-necked ducks, wood ducks and green-winged teal during spring and fall migrations. A cattail marsh bordering the pond is good habitat for green and great blue herons, and osprey hover above the pond in search of fish. Soras have been heard in the marsh in spring.

The newest 7-mile extension of the trail from Grand Gorge to Roxbury is particularly interesting. Here the trail follows wetlands as it squeezes through a narrow mountain pass. The steep hillsides echo with the flute-like notes of wood thrushes, hermit thrushes and veeries. These wonderful songs continue well past dusk—vespers of the woods. Ravens, now an established Catskills species, nest here and are quite vocal and visible when their young fledge in early summer. In the trailside stream and bog, hooded mergansers, wood ducks, belted kingfishers and occasionally Virginia rails are seen.

The trail generally parallels Rte. 10 from Bloomville to Stamford; Rte. 23 from Stamford to Grand Gorge; and Rte. 30 from Grand Gorge to Roxbury. It can be accessed wherever it crosses roads off these highways. Good starting locations with parking include Kirkside Park in Roxbury, the trail crossing on Rte. 30 south of Grand Gorge, the crossing on Rte. 23 in Stamford, Cornell Ave. in Hobart, and the Rte. 10 crossing in Bloomville. More information and a map is available at www.catskillscenictrail.org.

Andy Mason

### **5 Camera Trap Sites Active This Winter**

Again this winter we are using wildlife cameras in an effort to locate winter resident Golden Eagles. Last season we photographed at least 3 Golden Eagles in Delaware and Otsego Counties. Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, Rough-legged Hawks, Common Ravens, American Crows, coyotes, a bobcat, a fisher and foxes were also recorded.

We couldn't get access to good sites in Delaware County this season so all 5 are in Otsego. Multiple goldens were seen in Delaware County at a site in Harpersfield last winter. However, when the landowner at that spot was asked for permission to set up a camera on his property, he turned us down fearing the bait would attract coyotes which would endanger his family.

This season's sites are in Burlington, Edmeston, Middlefield, Morris and Worcester. All sites became active the week before Christmas.

We will be presenting a program on March 18 at the Elm Park Church in Oneonta showing the best of our photographs from the camera traps. Sample photos can be found on our website – www.doas.us.

Tom Salo



### March Eagle Count at Davis State Park

We are now recruiting counters to conduct a month long count at Davis State Park in March. If you would like to participate this spring, please contact Tom Salo at tomsalo@localnet.com or 607-965-8232.

#### **Christmas Bird Count Data**

Data from the Oneonta Christmas Bird Count can be found on our web site www.doas.us

### What is the GBBC?

### The 2011 GBBC will take place Friday, February 18, through Monday, February 21. Please join us!

The **Great Backyard Bird Count** is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, 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.

To participate count birds anywhere for as little or as long as you wish during the four-day period. You tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time. To report their counts, you fill out an online checklist at the Great Backyard Bird Count website.

### Why Participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count? Your counts can help us answer many questions:

- How will this winter's snow and cold temperatures influence bird populations?
- Where are winter finches and other "irruptive" species that appear in large numbers during some years but not others?
- How will the timing of birds' migrations compare with past years?
- How are bird diseases, such as West Nile virus, affecting birds in different regions?
- What kinds of differences in bird diversity are apparent in cities versus suburban, rural, and natural areas?

Are any birds undergoing worrisome declines that point to the need for conservation attention?

For more info visit: http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc

### Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society American Kestrel Project

The February monthly program meeting will be on Friday the 18th at 7:30pm in the Elm Park Methodist Church, located at 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

Jillian Liner, Audubon New York's Director of Bird Conservation, located at Cornell Lab of Ornithology will present the Kestrel Project that is aimed at reversing the decline of the American Kestrel in New York State by addressing a main threat to their population, lack of suitable nests sites within appropriate habitat.

DOAS is participating in this important project this year with five locations, three of which are schools. This helps us press forward with our goal from the family outreach program to involve more children, and students to participate in the environment and take to the outdoors.

The monthly meeting and presentation is free and open to the public. Refreshments are served. For further information, contact: Eleanor Moriarty, Program Director at 607-278-4083

### **Coming Activities**

### **February**

**February 15, 2011** — DOAS Board Meeting at 7 PM at the Elm Park Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. For more information contact Dave Kiehm at (607) 286-9222.

**February 18, 2011** — DOAS Program: The New York State Kestrel Project by Jillian Liner, Audubon New York Director of Bird Conservation. The program will begin at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Refreshments will be served. For more information contact Program Chairman Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 278-4083.

**February 18 - 21, 2011** — Great Backyard Bird Count. The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event, led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, 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.

**February 26, 2011** — Owl Field Trip — DOAS will lead a field trip looking for Short-eared Owls and other winter grassland birds. We will meet at 3:00 PM at the Cooperative Extension parking lot on Lake Road in Cooperstown. It will be mostly a driving trip with little walking, but be prepared for cold weather. All are welcome. For any questions, contact Bob Donnelly at 607-264-8156 or rsdonn@yahoo.com

#### March

**March 15, 2011** — DOAS Board Meeting at 7 PM at the Elm Park Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. For more information contact Dave Kiehm at (607) 286-9222.

**March 18, 2011** — DOAS Program: The Golden Eagle Winter Project by Tom Salo, DOAS Board Member.

### **April**

**April 3, 2011** — Annual spring waterfowl trip around Lake Otsego and environs. For more information, contact John Davis at davi7js4@hughes.net or 607-547-9688

**April 15, 2011** — DOAS Program: Catskill Black Bears by Larry Bifaro, Wildlife Biologist, DEC Region 4 (9 counties), co-leader of New York State's Black Bear Management Team.

### May

**May 20, 2011** — DOAS Program: Birds of Costa Rica by the Fielders.



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Red Poll, by Dave Kiehm

# October-December Bird Sightings

There are lots of birds to report over this long time period. On 10/17 a Great Horned Owl clenching a dead crow flew overhead and landed on a Norway Spruce bough in Richard de Rosa's yard in Cooperstown. They locked eyes with one another. The owl backed down, dropped the crow and flew into the woods. The first sighting of Pine Siskins, ten of them, appeared at Charlie Scheim's feeder in Oneonta on the 19th. Becky Gretton reported 2 Northern Harriers, 2 Turkey Vultures, 26 Red-tailed Hawks and 1 immature Golden Eagle at the Betty & Wilbur Davis Park in Westville on 10/23. On the 25th Dave Kiehm saw 8 Evening Grosbeaks in Oneonta and John Davis saw a Fox Sparrow in Cooperstown. The next day 2 big chattering flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds soared above John Davis' feeders in Cooperstown never stopping to alight and Sandy Bright was entertained by a singing Chipping Sparrow in Oneonta. On the 30th John Davis reported 2 Evening Grosbeaks, the first for him in nearly 10 years.

November produced a number of highlights. A flock of 10 Evening Grosbeaks hung around the feeders of Joe & Alice Richardson in Morris on 11/2. The next day Becky Gretton saw a flock of 15-20 Snow Buntings gliding and sharply turning in Glimmerglass Park. On the 7th Katharine Dawson saw a Bald Eagle perched high in a tree in Bainbridge. Andy Mason heard a calling Carolina Wren on the Greenway Trail on 11/9. A Northern Bobwhite walked up onto Melissa Godek's back deck in Oneonta to scope out some newly arrived snow tires. The docile bobwhite is still hanging around and isn't running away when approached. Her husband got a great photo op. On the 20th a Fox Sparrow flew into Eleanor Moriarity's feeder in Davenport.

As winter approached December ushered in some bird wonders. Dorian Huneke saw 2 Bald Eagles circling overhead in Delhi on the 4th. She also saw flocks of Canada Geese in Treadwell on the 7th. In a neighbor's pond in Delhi, Kathy Mario was surprised to see a Great Blue Heron and wondered if it would survive the 15 degree temperatures predicted for the coming days. Tom Salo saw multiple flocks of Canada and Snow Geese in W.

Burlington on 12/8. The Snows were circling about appearing to be lost and the Canadas were moving into the twilight. Around that time H. Marie Walters watched a flock of 35-50 Common Goldeneyes from her winterized camp on Canadarago Lake. As one goldeneye dove the others followed suit as if it were a water ballet. She had also seen 3-5 Common Mergansers, 6 Mallards and 2 Buffleheads on the lake. Common Redpolls exploded on the scene between 12/23-12/30. Marge Mathis saw 2 in Morris, Alice & Joe Richardson had a large flock also in Morris, Jeff & Audrey Murray saw 30-40 in Fly Creek, Bill Miller had 1 in Freetown, Tom Salo reported 50 in W. Burlington and Andy Mason had 5-6 in Jefferson. The year ended with sightings of a Northern Shrike in W. Burlington by Tom Salo on 12/24, of 2 Great Horned Owls volleying in the woods behind Andy Mason's house in Jefferson on Christmas Day and of a flock of 8 American Robins in Fly Creek by Jeff & Audrey Murray on 12/26. 2010 was another amazing bird year.

Contact me dbenko@frontiernet.net, 6815 Co. Hwy. 16, Delhi, NY 13753, 607 829-5218 if you have bird sightings to report.

Dianne Benko