



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

Coming Activities

February

February 10 – Eagle Field Trip

February 15 – DOAS Program

February 15-18 – GBBC

February 19 – DOAS Board Mtg

March

March 15 – DOAS Program

March 19 – DOAS Board Meeting

April

April 19 – DOAS Program

May

May 17 – DOAS Program

June

June 2 – Birds, brunch, beer

More information on page 7

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

Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch Internship

When I was first approached about becoming a DOAS intern I had never even heard of the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch (FMHW). Tom Salo approached my professor, Dr. Peter Fauth, about recruiting a student to sort through thousands of photographs taken by an automated camera set up in front of deer carcasses to determine how many different bald eagles came to feed. Dr. Fauth then suggested turning the project into an internship that would involve participating in the FMHW to learn how to identify raptors in flight. I jumped right on board.



Bald Eagles caught on an automated camera at one of our winter eagle monitoring sites

I'm a biology major studying at Hartwick College and discovered my love for birding when I took an Ornithology course in the spring of 2012 with Dr. Fauth. Although I had never heard of FMHW and didn't really know what it was all about, I was excited to get more experience with birding. The more I read about FMHW, the more excited I became. By the time the fall rolled around I was more than anxious to start.

The first part of my internship was sorting through the photographs taken by an automated camera that was set up in front of deer carcasses. The camera took a photograph every minute that it sensed motion. In total, there were approximately

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President's Message

Winter Musings on the Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)

Of all raptors, owls (particularly the Great Horned Owl) have always been among my favorites. I am fortunate to have had opportunities to work with many of these awe-inspiring birds up-close as both an educator and rehabilitator. When attempting to describe a Great Horned Owl, 'beautiful' just doesn't do them justice. The brown, gold/tan/red, black and white mottling of their feathers; their brilliant gold eye coloration; the feather tufts on their head that stand up straight or lay down flat depending on their mood; and those feet...those huge, powerful feet with broad black talons. The only thing not beautiful about these birds is their breath (when you work with these birds closely, you are unfortunately exposed to this).

Great Horned Owls, common throughout the U.S., are one of the first species to begin breeding in our area. They tend to opportunistically seek out pre-existing nests of other raptors or sometimes tree cavities and stumps. They line the nests lightly with feathers and down and begin laying their eggs in February and March. Great Horned Owls typically lay 2 eggs (although sometimes up to as many as six) which incubate for about 4-6 weeks before the young hatch. Most will brood only one set of chicks each year, although if a catastrophic event occurs during nesting, some will attempt a second brood later in the season.

Great Horned Owl chicks are born semi-altricial (naked and eyes closed) but quickly produce downy feathers to help keep them warm during their first weeks. They fledge in about 5-6 weeks after hatching. A young owl is a fluffball of feathers, about a foot in height, with big eyes and is likely the cutest thing you will ever see. If you should come across one at this stage, resist the urge to assume it needs rescuing. If the young fall out of the nest, the parent owl will continue to provide food and care for it. Since ground locations are more vulnerable to predators (cats, dogs, foxes, crows, etc.), the best course of action is to find it a perch above ground in a nearby tree and leave the area. A young owl with an obvious injury can be taken to a vet for immediate care, but needs to be placed with an adult owl during rehabilitation to assure that it will imprint on its own species.

Imprinting is likely the saddest of all injuries to wildlife. It results from an owl (or other animal) being raised by people during the critical stage of development when the bird identifies itself with its species. An imprinted owl is as "unreleasable" as an owl that has lost a wing. It develops no fear of people and can be a safety hazard (remember those feet and talons). In addition, imprinted owls also typically have trouble interacting with others of their species and likely will never have the opportunity for breeding.

Since these owls are so well camouflaged by their feather patterns, the best way to find them in the wild is to look for certain signs. White wash (dried owl poop) on the trunks of trees is a good indicator of a Great Horned Owl nest or roosting location as are owl pellets (regurgitated remains of undigested fur and bones from previously eaten prey). Another reliable indicator is to listen and watch for crows making a ruckus.

I was once called out to a property of a family with a very young baby who said that every afternoon at 1pm, the crows would come in droves and make so much noise that it would wake the child. The house was a new construction on property bordering a white pine forest. I arrived at their home at the same time as the first

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THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

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FOUNDED 1968

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To contribute notes or articles for

The Belted Kingfisher, email:

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Conservation and Legislation

DOAS submits comments on hydrofracking regulations—In the latest official action on the issue of hydraulic fracturing gas drilling in NY State, the Dep't. of Environmental Conservation recently took public comments on their draft regulations for permitting this activity. DOAS was among many organizations and citizens submitting comments calling the regulations flawed, and the timing of their release premature.

DEC has not yet finalized its environmental impact statement on hydrofracking, nor is an ongoing human health impact study review complete. This means they were unable to take these important documents into consideration in drafting the regulations.

What you can do—There have been calls for extending the comment period on the regulations. If this happens, please submit your own comments. Also, continue to support local efforts on moratoriums and bans at the local level. It may well be that drilling will be allowed only in those communities that have demonstrated approval of the practice.

The DOAS comments are available on our web site, www.doas.us.

Wolf protections to disappear?—In a very disappointing extension of its misguided approach to wolf protection, the Obama administration is proposing to remove the gray wolf from the endangered species list. This follows earlier decisions to hand over wolf management to several western states. This has lead to

liberal hunting seasons in these areas, with killing of hundreds of wolves in the first year.

The restoration of wolves is considered one of the biggest successes of the Endangered Species Act since it was passed in 1973. However, the work is not finished. Delisting the gray wolf will set back four decades of progress and expose America's wolves to unwarranted and unsustainable killing.

Delisting could also derail efforts to restore wolves to more of their historic range, including Colorado, the Pacific Northwest, Utah and California. Wolves are an important part of healthy ecosystems, keeping prey species in balance. An historic opportunity to revitalize some of the nation's best remaining wildlife habitat would be lost.

The time may come when removing wolf protections should be considered, but this is not it.

What you can do—Write President Barack Obama (The White House, Washington, DC 20500; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact>) and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar (Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20240; feedback@ios.doi.gov) and let them know that wolves are important to you and to the environment. Tell them that delisting wolves is premature, and encourage efforts to reintroduce this iconic species to their original range.

~ Andy Mason

(Winter Musings on the Great Horned Owl, continued from page 2)



Male Great Horned Owl successfully rehabilitated following auto collision and released in New Berlin, NY October 2007
- Wildlife Learning Company

crows - maybe two or three of them that sat in a few nearby trees cawing. Within five minutes there were over 50 crows, and more kept coming (I have a keen appreciation for crow communications as a result).

About 100 yards into the treeline, there was a nest with 2 visible young Great Horned Owls and just above them, an adult. The adult owl never budged despite ongoing swoops from the crows and a true cacophony of sound from every nearby tree. This lasted for about 20 minutes and then, poof - it was over. The crows left and the owls all seemed completely unfazed. I sympathized with the mother who was dealing with this as a daily event, but promised her it would likely only continue for a few more weeks until the young birds fledged. We all walked away appreciative of the opportunity to witness it so closely.

If you have children, check out *Owl Moon* (ages 3 and up), a 1988 Caldecott Award Winner, written by Jan Yolen and illustrated by John Schoenherr. It has long been one of our family favorites. For a list of current licensed wildlife rehabilitators in our area, please reference the DOAS website at www.doas.us.

~Susan O'Handley

Mitigation and Reintroduction: Is this the future for our birds?

Spending the last three months in Florida enhanced my realization that I belong to the tribe that believes environmental protection should have no grey lines, no blurring of beliefs, only a black ink etched focus, that looks sternly at the means to achieve an end.

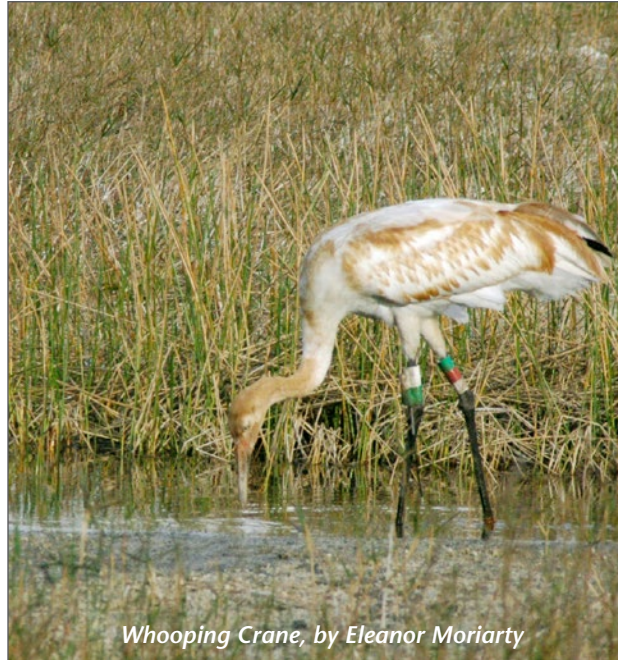
New York State has and continues to be battling the two tribes of environmental protection: frack, blast, pipelines construction and the destruction will be taken care of afterwards or embrace clear scientific evidence that states it cannot safely be done, so it should not be done. Both tribes understand the quick fix, "quick gain" and the short sighted view filled with obtaining an end regardless of the means.

In Florida, this approach of "quick-gain" and the short-sighted view cost the Everglades a 50% loss of its territory. The realization came late that through drainage and development, the ecological system necessary to provide the critical habitat for birds, plants, wildlife, as well as providing the water supply for the entire south Florida region was facing a tremendous threat. Scientists, environmentalists, and water resource specialists developed a plan (Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan) that was approved in the Water Resource Development Act of 2000. The implementation is a joint project between Federal, State and local government.

The two issues of mitigation and reintroduction were brought to my attention through a rare sighting of two juvenile whooping cranes, spotted on land that had been set aside by developers to compensate for intrusion upon the historic Everglades by construction of subdivisions. This area had long been drained for agricultural purposes, and now is partially surrounded by low levees and under the supervision of the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. Recently cleared of invasive species the maintenance has ceased since 2005 and upon viewing this area, the attempt to establish wetlands is a work in a raw state of progress.

The Whooping Cranes spotted in this area were part of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, (international coalition of public and private groups) and Operation Migration, which has played a leading role in the reintroduction of endangered Whooping Cranes since 2001 into Eastern North American. In

1940 the species was reduced to 15 birds in their eastern range. Today the eastern migratory population is only about 600 in existence, 445 of them in the wild, and aside from the WCEP (Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership) the other migrating population nests at Buffalo National Park in Northern Alberta Canada and winters in Aransas NWR on the Texas coast. A non-migratory flock of approximately 20 lives in central Florida and in Southern Louisiana.



Whooping Crane, by Eleanor Moriarty

These two juvenile Whooping Cranes, it was determined, were part of 6 juveniles that departed from the White River Marsh State Wildlife area in Green Lake County Wis. Led by an ultra-light aircraft, through Wisconsin, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia, to land on their wintering habitat at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge along the coast of Florida before Christmas. It was obviously an incredible thrill to see them, and at a respectful distance, I managed to take photos. The birders who went to see them appeared to be limited and from reading the bird postings, behavior protocol was followed.

The massive effort to undo the long term damage to both the Everglades

and the Whooping Crane is heroic, but the dependency upon the fragile relationship between the politics of government, corporations, takes the backing of dedicated public and private groups that will need to be organized and well-funded. The latest assault upon the Everglades Restoration Project is losing their state funding. Governor Scott has prioritized funding for development on the coastal areas of Florida. REALLY? New York State's scenario could be a duplicate of this type of thinking. The tribe (environmental agencies), who negotiates, puts into place what is believed to be safeguards, regulations, protections, to ward off the destruction that will definitely occur through hydrofracking, and all associated activities should perhaps look to other states for history lessons.

This is by no means a condemnation of mitigation or reintroduction as our Bald Eagle population has shown incredible success through the process of reintroduction. However, success is slow and manmade wetlands have not proved as successful as nature's original. New York State might not eventually have the public and private groups to access funding to restore, rebuild and contain the major destruction that will occur. We need to depend on our Environmental Agencies to be the tribe who is etched in a black ink focus.

~ Eleanor Moriarty

Hawkwatch Wrapup

The 2012 Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch season came to a close on December 30, 2012, with 9 raptors recorded—including five Golden Eagles—on strong northwest winds. Last bird of the season was an adult Golden Eagle at 1:30 PM. This was the 24th consecutive season of observation at the site.

Counting began on August 22, and continued for 108 days with 706 hours of coverage. Total raptors tallied was 5039, 6% below the 12 year average since full-time counting began at Franklin Mt., but an increase from 2011's total of 4609.

Golden Eagles numbered 172, near the average of 179, with good counts of 21 on November 4, 30 on November 5, 20 on November 13, and 20 on December 5.

Counters experienced lake effect snows on a number of late season dates with promising winds. These conditions reduce visibility and likely divert or obscure migrating birds.

Among other species, Sharp-shinned Hawk numbers were very good, with 637 representing the third highest total in the 24 year history of the count. Red-tailed Hawks stood at 1600, a modest rebound from 2011's low count of 1384, but still below past seasons.

Other species significantly above the 12 year average include Bald Eagle and Broad-winged Hawk. Species significantly below average include Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon.

As always, many thanks to the dedicated crew of Franklin Mt. counters and spotters, including Andy Cooper, Larry Dake, Tony Ferro, Fred Fries, Becky Gretton, Steve Hall, Richard Hendrick, Marilyn Leahy, Andrea Lodovico, Randy Lynch, Andy Mason, Abby Nelson, Ralph Niederlander, Leslie Preston, Tom Salo.

The DOAS board is hosting an appreciation dinner for the hawkwatch volunteers in January.

All Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch data is available at hawkcount.org. Information on the site can be found at franklinmt.org.

Eagle field trip

Thirty participants spotted 13 Bald Eagles on the DOAS field trip along the East and West Branches of the Delaware River, and Cannonsville Reservoir in Delaware County on Jan. 12. This was a relatively low count of birds for recent years, but several excellent views were enjoyed.

Other species included Red-tailed Hawks, Cooper's Hawk, Common and Hooded Mergansers, Ring-necked Ducks, and Common Loons.

Twenty satisfied eagle watchers enjoyed a convivial lunch following the trip.



*Two of the Bald Eagles spotted on this year's eagle trip,
by Erix Schokker*



*A Long-eared Owl that perched
near Bruce Milavec's deck in Milford Center, in late December*

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., '1306' is June 2013. Renewal information is found on page 7 in this issue—please renew and continue your support of DOAS and our programs.

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 and animal habitats study kits; and pond studies.

The deadline for grant submission is February 28, 2013. For more information or for application forms, see the Education Committee page of the DOAS web site, www.doas.us, or contact Susan O'Handley, sjohandley@gmail.com.



(Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch Internship, continued from page 1)
21,000 photographs. Luckily for me not all of the photographs contained eagles! I first separated all the photographs containing bald eagles from the ones without. In the process I saw some pretty cool things, including a raccoon, a skunk, red-tailed hawks,

and how to use the scope. When identifying raptors I learned to pay attention to overall shape, flight pattern, color and size. I can now identify a handful of raptors, but I am by no means an expert. I have also learned a lot about raptor migration and other behaviors.

The best day of my internship was when I saw my first kettle of broad-winged hawks. Don't get me wrong, I love the golden eagles, but the way the broad wings ride those thermals up is astonishing. If you don't know what I'm talking about you need to make a trip up to FMHW in September to see them.

During this internship I have learned a lot. My interest for birds started with songbirds, but now I have discovered a whole new world of birding. Now when I see a raptor flying over the valley I stop and ask myself things like, "Does that have a dihedral?" This internship has truly been a fantastic experience and I know what I have learned will stay with me for the rest of my life.

~ Abby Nelson

Abby Nelson will be making a short presentation at the March 15 program explaining how she counted the eagles in those 21,000 photographs



Abby Nelson at Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch, photo by Andy Cooper

golden eagles, and a lot of ravens. After separating the bald eagles out now I had about 3700 photos, I examined every bald eagle in each photograph, concentrating mostly on the head, beak, tail feathers, and feet, looking for unique characteristics. Once I found a unique characteristic on a bird, such as a dark spot on its beak, I checked all other eagles for the same feature.

For the second part of my internship, (and my favorite part), I went to FMHW for a few hours every Thursday. Everyone there was very helpful and taught me so much. The counters became my primary source of information. They taught me how to identify raptors in flight, record counts and weather information,



Golden Eagle caught on an automated camera

Upcoming Activities

February

February 10 – Eagle Field Trip: A second eagle field trip—details and location are to be determined. For information, contact Bob Donnelly (607) 652-2162, rsdonn@yahoo.com.

February 15 – DOAS Program: *Grass Pellets* by EnviroEnergyNY. The Miller family from Unadilla NY will present their grass pellet manufacturing success, an alternative and sustainable form of energy. This local family has produced from grass: pellets for fuel, soil enhancements, and created a barley straw pellet that is a natural algaecide for ponds. The barley straw pellets have now caught the attention of the cranberry growers in Massachusetts on Cape Cod. Using the barley straw pellets eliminates the need for chemicals.

The grass used for their products is not harvested until August and cutting the land in late summer protects the environment for wildlife, songbirds and turkey. The Millers are proving that their products can offer alternatives to farms to become productive and sustainable. The Millers are offering a way to produce products that will gain economic benefits to our local farms and landowners.

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 Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

February 15-18 – Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC): For information see: birdcount.org. Everyone is welcome, from beginners to experts.

February 19 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, Oneonta.

March

March 15 – DOAS Program: *What's Been Eating at Our Golden Eagle Feeders?* by Tom Salo, DOAS director and the NYS Coordinator for the Appalachian Eagle Project. Each winter since 2010 DOAS has participated in the Appalachian Eagles Project to document the presence of winter resident Golden Eagles. Road-killed deer are used as bait to attract the eagles. They are then photographed using motion sensitive wildlife cameras. The project monitors our winter eagle population and provides information on Golden Eagle range and population size.

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 Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

March 19 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, Oneonta.

April

April 19 – DOAS Program: *Birds of Ecuador* by Rudy Gelis, biologist.

May

May 17 – DOAS Program: *Adventures in Alaska Through the Eyes of a Lens* by Gail and Nelson DuBois.

June

June 2 – Save the Date: *Birds, Brunch and Beer* at the Ommegang Brewery. Birds, walks, great food, great auctions of local art work. Details will follow in upcoming issues.



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. 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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December-January Bird Sightings

Jpileaust when I thought I would be the last one to see a large flock of common redpolls, nature didn't disappoint me. As I was taking down Christmas decorations a flock of about 50 common redpolls glided in and landed around my birdfeeder. Peering through a nearby window I saw the garnet red tops of their heads from about four feet away. What a spectacular sight!

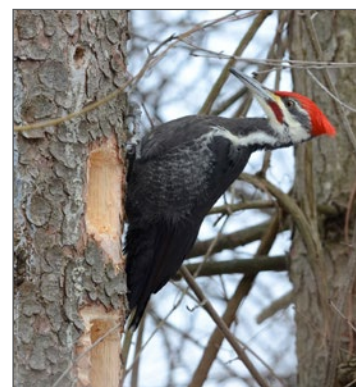
On 12/3 Dorian Huneke happened to be in her barnyard in Treadwell in time to see an adult Bald Eagle fly upstream followed by a Red-tailed Hawk not a half minute behind. A second Red-tail closed ranks pursuing the same path. I wonder where the party was. Over the next few days there was a common redpoll explosion. Andy Mason saw three accompanied by a lingering Red-winged Blackbird at his feeder in Jefferson, John Davis had his FOS Common Redpoll in Cooperstown, and Bob Donnelly reported 40-50 Redpolls in Roseboom along with 2 female Pine Grosbeaks at the end of his driveway in Cooperstown. On 12/9 Cynthia

Campbell watched a Bald Eagle on that funny little pond about a 1/2 mile north of Murphy Hill Rd. in Middlefield. Kay Crane saw a Great Blue Heron in Walton on 12/13. The next day Bob Donnelly observed 16 Gadwalls at the northern end of Clark Pond. On the 15th Angelika Rashkow and her son first heard the call and then later saw a Pileated Woodpecker in Hartwick. Right around sunset on 12/23 Dorian Huneke heard 2 Great Horned Owls hooting back and forth and the next morning she watched three flocks of Canada Geese (400+) pass overhead in Treadwell. A Red-bellied Woodpecker appeared at Alan's Lake on 12/25 according to Ted Buhl who says it is the first one he has ever seen there after having lived in the area for 19 years. On the 27th a pair of White-throated Sparrows and a Carolina Wren visited Gerianne Carillo in Milford. On the 28th Lisa Gorn saw (50) Snow Geese and (150) Canada Geese in separate flocks fly over her house south of Morris. She's also had a Carolina Wren hanging around since the fall. That day also brought 3 Long-tailed Ducks, one male, two females, to Otsego Lake as reported by Ted Buhl. Throughout December Nina and Joe

Hart in Franklin have had a mixture of gold and ruby colorings of both Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls numbering on average 25 and as many as 75. The sightings have been their own outdoor holiday decorations.

On New Year's Day Melissa Godek saw a flock of 10-15 Common Redpolls chit-chitting away as they flew through the pines on her property in Unadilla. A Fox Sparrow came to snack on the sunflower seeds on Marge Mathis' deck in Morris on 1/3. The next day while Becky Gretton was snowshoeing at the Glimmerglass Park Pavilion, a Golden Eagle flew overhead. On the 9th Marge Mathis missed getting a great photograph of a Cooper's Hawk perched on the deck railing of her Morris home. The next day she also had a Red-bellied Woodpecker show up. On her morning walk in Walton Kay Crane saw a White-winged Crossbill on 1/14. Could bird watching get any better!

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



*Pileated Woodpecker
by Dave Kiehm*