



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

COMING ACTIVITIES

NOVEMBER

11/20: Program:
“Does the Pika Have a
Future? Climate Change
May Decide”. Speaker:
Jean Miller (see bottom
right).

DECEMBER

12/1: Board meeting,
home of Barbara Marsala.

12/19: Otsego County
Christmas Bird Count
(Bob Miller, contact).

JANUARY 2010

1/2: Fort Plain Christmas
Bird Count (Tom Salo,
contact).

1/9: Eagle Trip, led by
Andy Mason.

1/15: Program: NYS Herb
Atlas findings, presented by
Paul Novak of NYSDEC
(see upcoming January
edition for details).

1/18: Waterfowl Count
(Andy Mason, contact).

SEE PAGE 5 FOR DETAILS

Purple Finch or House Finch?

Two female finches perched side by side at my feeder, one a House, the other a Purple. I was struck by how much larger and stockier the Purple looked. David Sibley confirms this: despite being the same length, Purple Finches weigh nearly 20% more than House Finches.

The boldly-striped head of the female Purple Finch makes it easy to distinguish from a House Finch, with its rather drab brown head. The males, however, are commonly confused, but there are several other features that can help in identification.

In addition to the heftiness of the body, consider how extensive the coloring is.

The red on a Purple covers the head and the hindneck, extends down the back, and “washes” the wings. House finches lack the heavy coloration on the top of the head and the hindneck and back, usually have no red in the wings, and show heavily streaked flanks.

Color shade is an indicator, though less reliable. House Finches are usually brighter and more orange-tinted while, in Roger Tory Peterson’s words, Purple Finches look like they have been “dipped in raspberries.”

See the accompanying table on page 6, which sums up these and other differences.

~ Sandy Bright

NOVEMBER PROGRAM FOCUSES ON THE PIKA

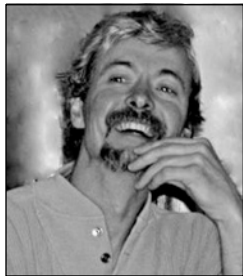
The little pika lives in the alpine regions of the Rockies, and his fragile ecosystem is being threatened by Climate Change: the ever warmer temperatures in these regions are causing severe troubles for the pika.

Our presenter for this program will be Jean Miller. Jean is an active environmentalist and writer who has spent over 30 summers in the Big Horn Mountain area of Wyoming. She is a charter member of DOAS, was president for 13 years, and is still active on the board of directors. Jean will tell us about the fascinating and delicate alpine ecosystem and how the pika survives there. She will also speak about some of the changes worldwide as the temperatures slowly rise with climate change.

The program will begin at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Refreshments will be served. For further information, contact Program Chair Eleanor Moriarty at 607-435-2054, email ellie2@directv.net.



◆◆◆
All DOAS Programs are free and open to the public.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:*Tom Salo***Please Consider a Donation to DOAS**

We live in a special place. Hellbenders crawl unseen on the bottoms of our streams. Golden Eagles concentrate here like nowhere else in New York. The NYS Breeding Bird Atlas shows we have among the highest diversity of breeding birds in the state. Our habitats are diverse. Our hills and valleys are beautiful. While there are a number of effective conservation organizations locally, we have our own focus: wildlife and ecosystems.

Our activities range from advocacy and research to public education. Our programs and field trips are well attended. Our volunteers are among the most dedicated I've ever seen. We do a lot with very little. However, we need funds to continue to operate effectively. To a large degree we depend on your donations. National Audubon provides some support. Your membership helps. However, at this time I need to ask you to consider making an extra donation to DOAS.

Money for regular operations is an issue for many chapters. Several years ago funds received from National Audubon were cut. Because of our need to balance the budget, we decided to stop sending the Belted Kingfisher to National Audubon Members who do not also belong to DOAS. We still mail them one issue each year in September but they do not get the other eight issues.

We currently need funds for a computer projector. Our old slide projector is almost completely obsolete. If you want to dedicate your donation for some other activity such as Golden Eagle research or the day camp, we would welcome that. Other possibilities include the Audubon Adventures school program, the hawkwatch, or the mini-grants for schools. Or, you can allow us to decide how best to use it.

We also ask you to consider making a bequest. We have received several in recent years. The first bequest came from the estate of Stephen Parker, a professional photographer who spent a lot of time at the sanctuary. We named the nature trail after him. The proceeds from the sale of his photos have been used for educational activities. The mini-grants for schools have been funded by the sale of Stephen's photos since we started the program. We still receive income from his photos but it has diminished over the years. We have had to reduce the amount we award in grants each year by a third. An additional source of income would allow us to restore the original amount.

Recent bequests have allowed us to weather recent hard times. Even though we are very careful with our spending, we have been depending on these funds to cover small shortfalls in income the past 2 years. Because we do so much with so little, even a small donation or bequest can make a big difference in what we can do.

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

**THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO
AUDUBON SOCIETY****FOUNDED 1968****NEWSLETTER EDITOR:**

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THE BELTED KINGFISHER PLEASE SEND TO
"KINGFISHER EDITOR" AT THE ABOVE ADDRESS,
OR EMAIL EDITOR@DOAS.US

COVER ARTWORK BY DAVE KIEHM

CONSERVATION AND LEGISLATION

BY ANDY MASON

Good News from Albany for a Change

On Oct. 13, NY Governor David Paterson signed the Green Jobs/Green New York Act into law, following passage by overwhelming margins in both houses of the state legislature.

This legislation provides for creation of jobs in the state that will reduce energy use and costs for citizens and small businesses. It includes revolving loans and green job training programs for weatherization projects.

The loan program is expected to attract middle-class homeowners and small businesses that will pay back the loans from money saved on their energy bills. Maximum loans will be

\$13,000 for residential properties and \$26,000 for commercial properties.

The job training component will focus on new and displaced workers. Community based organizations qualify to administer the training programs and must go through a competitive procurement process. The state has a new website for those seeking green jobs:

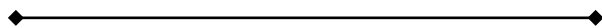
www.greencareersny.com.

The weatherization loans will be funded through a portion of the \$112 million collected from Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative auctions. During the auctions, businesses buy carbon emissions credits.

A separate Weatherization Assistance Program funded through the federal stimulus package is expected to provide New York with \$384 million to weatherize 45,000 homes.

Gov. Paterson's stated goal is to retrofit 1 million homes in the next five years. This effort helps the economy and the environment, and will save dollars and greenhouse gases.

What you can do: Thank Gov. Paterson and your state representatives for this forward-looking action. This is an example of how the state can take the lead in addressing global warming.



Companies Taking a Fresh Look at Climate Change

Something of a schism is taking place within the US Chamber of Commerce—the pro-business organization that is strongly opposing federal legislation to address climate change. A number of notable Chamber member corporations have broken ranks and left the group due to its stance. These include Apple, Nike, and even General Electric and several major utility companies.

One “green” company that has not taken this step is Toyota, maker of the Prius hybrid auto and sponsor of a series of environmental programs through National Audubon.

There is an effort on to let Toyota know that their split personality on this matter is unacceptable, and to get them to join others in bolting the Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber's lobbying efforts in Washington are funded by the dues paid by its members, so Toyota is essentially contributing to stopping an effort to reduce greenhouse gases, while profiting from its image and sales to buyers making a commitment to limit their own carbon footprint.

What you can do: Let Toyota know that they need to state their true principles and act on them by leaving the Chamber of Commerce. If you are a Toyota owner, make sure they know, and that climate change is a concern to you. They can be contacted at 800-331-4331; through their web site, www.toyota.com; or by writing Chairman Yoshimi Inaba, Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc., 19001 South Western Ave., Torrance, CA 90501.

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CAMPING AND CONDORS

Growing up in New England, one of early Fall's great treats was homemade apple pie, warm with a slice of the sharpest cheddar cheese to be found. This year I replaced that early Fall treat with an even better treat: a memorable camping trip out West with my daughter. A highlight was camping at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon and spotting the largest land bird in North America: the California Condor.

Standing with a group of European and Asian tourists, camera ready, we looked up just as the Condor came soaring into view. All were awed by its size. This magnificent bird has a wing span of up to 9 1/2 feet and weighs 16-23 lb. How fitting that this grand creature was at home in this beautiful canyon. A nearby park ranger shared more detail on the Condor: only a blood test can differentiate a female from a male, but the adult Condor has the orange-pinkish bare head, while the juvenile is grayish-black. In flight, they have a flat wing unlike the rock and roll V of the Turkey Vulture. The adult Condor has white triangle-shaped patches underneath its wings. They are classified as new world vultures and are opportunistic, feeding exclusively on deer, cattle, and large rodent



Photo by Eleanor Moriarty

carrion. In the Arizona and Utah area they feed on Elk, Mule Deer and Big Horn Sheep, all the quest of hunters.

My research on the reintroduction program revealed that diet continues to take a heavy toll on the Condor. Being a scavenger, ingesting the fragments of lead ammunition remaining in carcasses results in a deadly level of lead poisoning. The push to bring about alternative forms of ammunition is a focus of a number of leading environmental groups. (*See Lead Bullets article, Page 7*).

The Condor has a short history of recovery. When the Europeans arrived in Western North America, the Condor had a stronghold on the Pacific Coast. Their numbers plummeted quickly through shooting, habitat loss, egg collecting and, the number one culprit, lead poisoning. By 1982, the total population was 22. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began a captive

breeding program in 1983. Two years later, the Condor numbers had declined to 9 birds in the wild. The last bird was captured in 1987. Due to the efforts of this captive breeding program, 70 Condors currently soar over Northern Arizona and Utah. Many of these magnificent birds frequent the Grand Canyon, arriving in late afternoon to roost for the night. As of April 2009, there are 8 wild-bred condors flying free in Arizona and Utah and five active nest caves in the Grand Canyon and the Vermilion Cliffs.

Perhaps an upside to our struggling economy is the need for re-evaluating what truly creates a quality life. The Grand Canyon, the Condor and camping with my daughter brought a huge boost of quality to my life this year. Ken Burns, noted documentary film director, spent five years filming our National Parks. His documentary aired on PBS this past September, raising the awareness level as to our national treasures. In the September/October issue of "Audubon", Kenn Kaufman wrote an article on a dozen National Parks that offer spectacular scenery and great birding. Maybe there's a little movement going on.

~Eleanor Moriarty

HAWKWATCH NEWS

2009 is shaping up as an excellent season at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch. As of the third week of October, last year's total count for raptors had already been surpassed, with the bulk of the Red-tailed Hawks—typically the most numerous species—yet to come. Last year was admittedly a down season, but there has been a big rebound this year.

The seasonal record for Broad-winged Hawks was surpassed in September, topping 2000 for the first time. The previous high was 1639 in 2007.

Golden Eagles have started their annual appearance, with 12 counted to date. This species should increase into mid-November (around 200 are seen annually).

Visitors, spotters and counters are always welcome at the hawkwatch. For more information, contact Andy Mason, (607) 652-2162, AndyMason@earthling.net, or Tom Salo, (607) 965-8232, tomsalo@localnet.com. If you do visit, be sure to dress warmly!

Forecasts of anticipated good flights at the hawkwatch are sent out by email a day or two in advance. To receive these alerts, visit www.pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/hawkcast/ to sign up. Daily tallies from Franklin Mt. are also available by email—contact Andy Mason as above.

More information and directions to the hawkwatch at the DOAS Sanctuary can be found at www.franklinmt.org.

~ Andy Mason

GET INVOLVED! CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING UPCOMING DOAS EVENTS:

Annual Christmas Bird Count

The DOAS annual Christmas Bird Count is Saturday, December 19. This is our 41st year of participation in this national count. Everyone, novice or experienced, is welcome to join us on that fun day. Small groups in one or two cars count all the birds they see in their assigned area for whatever hours they choose. Each group has a leader who will have received appropriate materials beforehand. Alternatively, instead of joining a group you can count birds at your own feeder off and on throughout the day. If you are a new counter for either the group counts or the feeder counts please phone Bob Miller at 608-432-5767. People who have participated before will be contacted.

~ Bob Miller

Annual Eagle Trip

Saturday, Jan. 9, 2010 is the date for the annual DOAS field trip to view wintering Bald Eagles. The trip 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 on this trip. We also 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 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.

~ Andy Mason

Waterfowl Count

The NY State Ornithological Association's annual statewide waterfowl count is scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 18, 2010. DOAS covers Otsego Lake and the Susquehanna River above Unadilla, the Unadilla River, and the Cannonsville Reservoir and W. Branch of the Delaware River.

Anyone interested in helping with this census please contact Andy Mason, (607) 652-2162, AndyMason@earthling.net.

~ Andy Mason

NEW HAWK COUNTERS RECOGNIZED

Two dedicated participants at Franklin Mountain recently passed the counter vetting process. Becky Gretton and Randy Lynch were presented with their official "Counter" hats by DOAS President Tom Salo at the Charter Dinner on October 16. The process of becoming a Franklin Mountain counter involves a lot of time spent on the mountain. To be recognized as a hawk "counter", a consensus of current counters must agree you are competent at both hawk identification and hawk counting. Hours of spotting while being observed by all the different counters is necessary. Congratulations Becky and Randy.

~ Tom Salo



Photo by Dave Kiehm
From left to right: Becky Gretton,
Tom Salo, and Randy Lynch.

Please Note: DOAS field trips are open to the public. Participants should meet at the stated time and location -- please be prompt. We encourage carpooling: please help with expenses if you are in someone else's vehicle. Most trips include a moderate amount of easy walking; leaders will note any strenuous hiking. Please expect to provide your own food and drink unless a food stop is indicated. In case of bad weather, check with the leader about cancellation.

**FAVORITE PLACES SERIES:
PLAINFIELD STATE FOREST**

This isolated State Forest in northwestern Otsego County has nice diverse habitats. Old Fields, brush and mixed forests line the seasonal dirt road that traverses the property. Conifer plantations provide cover and cone crops. There is a nice pond next to the road. A washed out beaver pond offers some wet habitat of a different nature. These areas are home to a large number of bird species. Northern Goshawks and Ravens nest here. 16 species of wood warbler



were found during the Atlas. Thrushes are common. In the brushy areas you will find Eastern Towhees, Field Sparrows and Indigo Buntings. In 2008, a Clay-colored Sparrow was found in an abandoned field.

Winter finches visit the conifers during irruption years. The seasonal roads make the forest difficult to access in winter. However, a visitor on skis can move easily on the roads.

The forest can be accessed by turning west off NYS 51 in West Exeter. There is a sign on the left where you turn into the forest. From the south, the town roads off County Highway 19 provide access.

~ Tom Salo

BOB AND JEAN MILLER HONORED

DOAS is pleased to announce that two of its founding members have been named “Conservationists of the Year” by the Otsego County Conservation Association. Bob and Jean Miller are well-known to local birders and naturalists for their energetic devotion to the cause of conservation. In addition to organizing the County’s Christmas and May bird counts, Bob Miller was editor of “The Belted Kingfisher” until last summer. (Bob was honored at the DOAS Charter Dinner in October as well, receiving a beautiful print by Dave Kiehm in recognition of his 3-plus decades of service as Kingfisher editor). Jean was Bob’s faithful assistant in this endeavor, bringing to readers countless news items and updates on local, national and global conservation issues. Jean has also led wildflower walks for the chapter and has been an invited speaker for DOAS, the Catskill Center for Advanced Learning, and other groups.

The Millers will be recognized at OCCA’s annual dinner on Friday, November 13 at the Stella Luna Ristorante in Oneonta. If interested in attending, contact OCCA (547-4488 or admin@occainfo.org). Reservations must be received no later than Friday, Nov. 6.

Congratulations to both Jean and Bob!

~ Joe Richardson



Photo by John Davis

Bird Identification: Purple Finch vs. House Finch, continued from the front page

	Purple Finch	House Finch
Color shade	Raspberry red / magenta	Crimson or orange-tinted
Head	Extensive red	Brownish cap with a “headband” of red
Breast and flank	Faint streaks infused with red	Red on breast, heavy brown streaking on flanks
Wings	Washed in red	Usually no red in wings
Neck and back	Extensive red	Brownish with indistinct streaks
Bill	Longer bill, less curved on top	Shorter, stubbier bill, curved on top
Tail	Deeply notched	Slightly notched
Habitat	Prefer woodlands but will visit feeders	Adapted to city life, will visit feeders
Song	A rich warble	A similar warble but less rich, with a diagnostic burry note inserted
Female	Boldly-striped head	Plain brown head

IT'S TIME TO PHASE OUT LEAD BULLETS

Wildlife advocates are well aware of the impacts of lead on birds. The use of lead shot over water was banned years ago because water birds ingested the toxic pellets. The small bits of lead found on the bottoms of lakes were consumed to serve as grit. Lead from fishing sinkers has been banned in many places for the same reason. After a huge effort to capture and breed a tiny remnant population of California Condors, many were released into the wild. Lead from bullet fragments is a limiting factor in their recovery. They are attracted to the remains of dead animals that hunters shoot. Any bird that feeds on carrion is at risk.

Locally, Bald and Golden Eagles consume lead via carcasses. Both species migrate through New York: south during deer season, north during coyote season. The hunting of both coyotes and deer results in lead contaminated carcasses spread across the landscape.

Toxic impacts have resulted in legislation restricting the use of lead ammunition and sinkers in some places. While we consider what more might be done to help protect wildlife

from lead poisoning here, what about people who eat wild game? Are they at similar risk? The Peregrine Fund convened a conference in May 2008 to address the implications of ingesting lead ammunition for both wildlife and people. Their findings raise concern. Studies in Minnesota and North Dakota found a large proportion of venison in their venison donation programs had detectable levels of lead. In the case of North Dakota, more than half the packages of ground venison donated in 2007 contained lead.

Lead is a neurotoxin with well known harmful effects. Anyone who eats wild meat should be concerned about consuming lead. Bullets can fragment into hundreds of pieces. It is difficult to find and remove all the lead. When meat is ground, it is mixed with other, uncontaminated meat. The grinder can also pulverize the metal and contaminate a large volume.

Some bullets are designed to fragment on impact. The more fragmentation, the more contamination. The worst bullets leave hundreds of fragments, some as far as 14" from the entry hole. Hunters that are willing to

do some research can choose a bullet that fragments very little. An even better choice is to buy lead-free bullets. Excellent lead-free cartridges are now available for most rifles and shotguns, and are an effective alternative to conventional ammunition. Their availability improves as lead use is restricted in some areas. Currently, there are no restrictions on lead bullets in New York. I spoke to a DEC biologist. The state does not appear to be addressing the issue. A call to New York's venison donation program was not returned.

Whether you are a local Bald Eagle, a Golden Eagle moving through rural NY in migration, or someone who benefits from the venison donation program, you should support a phase-out of lead bullets. If you are a hunter trying to fill your larder, you should purchase lead-free bullets. If they are not available at the local gun shop, they can be purchased from Cabela's by phone or online.

For more on this issue, visit http://www.peregrinefund.org/lead_conference.

~ Tom Salo

DOAS BOARD ESTABLISHES POSITION ON GAS DRILLING

At the October Board Meeting, the Board of Directors voted to oppose hydrofracturing gas exploration and production in our region and elsewhere. Our comments to New York State will reflect this position. More information will follow in the January issue. You can find our position statement on our website: www.doas.us.

~ Jean T. Miller

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.

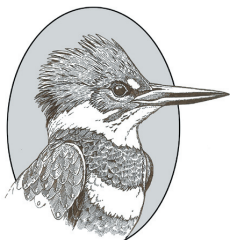
Note: Please mail National Audubon *renewals* to address on renewal notice.

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Golden Eagle, photo by Dave Kiehm. What a beauty!

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER BIRD SIGHTINGS

As a recent result of my retirement from teaching I've been able to go birding on a regular basis both getting good exercise and seeing some great birds. One morning I watched half a dozen Northern Flickers chase each other around throughout the brush, obviously communicating with one another to make plans for their eventual migration south. Meanwhile a Belted Kingfisher perched on a telephone wire overlooking a pond, kept one eye on the cavorting flickers and the other eye on the pond trying to secure its next meal. On my way back home I passed a family of Eastern Bluebirds. Retirement couldn't be better.

John Birk saw a Great Egret in Bainbridge on 9/14 and Charlie Scheim also reported one and an Osprey in W. Oneonta the next day. Rose Beers was still seeing Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in N. Franklin as of 9/15 and said they probably would have stayed around longer if she hadn't run out of sugar for her feeder. I saw a pair

of American Kestrels hunting on a wire near my house in Treadwell (9/16). On Ouleout Creek Dorian Huneke was delighted to see a Great Egret on 9/19. Apparently that species of bird was making its rounds in our area. Tom Salo still had Eastern Meadowlarks as late as 9/20 in W. Burlington. A Northern Harrier also cruised by his property. Becky Gretton watched as two immature Cooper's Hawks interacted with one another while some curious squirrels in a picnic area of Glimmerglass Park enjoyed the show (9/24). White-throated Sparrows made an appearance at Tom Salo's place in W. Burlington on 10/11.

If you have bird sightings to report, please contact me dbenko@frontiernet.net, 6815 Co. Hwy. 16, Delhi, NY 13753, 607 829-5218 by November 29, 2009 for the January issue of The Belted Kingfisher.

~ Dianne Benko