



# THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

## Coming Activities

### November

**Nov 18** — DOAS Program

### December

**Dec 6** — DOAS Board Meeting

**Dec 17** — DOAS Christmas Bird Count

**Dec 30** — Fort Plain Christmas Bird Count

### January

**Jan 15** — NY State Ornithological Association Waterfowl Count

**Jan 17** — DOAS Board Meeting

**Jan 20** — DOAS Program

**Jan 21** — Annual Eagle Trip

*More information on page 7*

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

## DOAS Fall Field Trips

DOAS led two trips this fall to support the educational information from our monthly meetings. Following up with the September 16th excellent presentation on native plants versus invasive species in New York State, the next weekend, on Saturday September 24th we built upon that educational base to visit the Mountain Top Arboretum, located on route 23C and Maude Adams Road in Tannersville. This incredible preserve is situated 2400 feet above sea level, has three main areas to stroll through with breathtaking Catskill Mountain views from every angle.



*Fir Trees, Mountain Top Arboretum, by Barbara Marsala*

The highlights of this field trip through the Western Meadows, were the rain garden planted with acid loving shrubs, the conifers (52 species), native and non-native, butterfly garden, and the show stopper, exposed Devonian era bedrock aged at 375 million years old. Looking from this bedrock, to a wooded area beyond a small pond, we were treated to Dawn Redwoods, one of the most ancient trees still living on earth, and were found 65 million years ago across the entire Northern Hemisphere. In close proximity, is bald cypress. The Eastern Meadow has a wetland, filled with native plants and shrubs to support a spring song bird population.

We are planning a trip back in the spring to view the exciting blooming of the area along with the return of our songbirds.

The October field trip to Montezuma which occurred on Saturday the 15th came ahead

*(continued on page 5)*

## President's Message

### Chasing Energy and Conserving Nature

Ever since the first coal mine was dug in Wales and the first oil well drilled in Pennsylvania, industrial societies have based their growth – and increasingly, their very existence – on fossil fuel energy. A reliable textbook of environmental science reports that in 1970 fully 98% of energy production in the United States came from petroleum, natural gas and coal. I suspect that fossil fuels' percentage of the total has not declined much in the past 40 years (even as total energy use has mushroomed), despite attempts to develop other energy sources and to encourage more energy-conserving vehicles and homes. Per capita energy consumption in America remains by far the highest in the world, even as rapidly growing populations in other countries increasingly aspire to our own energy-guzzling lifestyle.

Today almost every issue of the Oneonta Daily Star, or the New York Times, or Britain's Guardian Weekly, brings news of controversies relating to energy's uncertain supply and insatiable demand: "Richfield Springs Wind Project Faces Resistance." "Pro- and Anti-Fracking Candidates Woo Voters." "Proposed Pipeline Linking Alberta Oil to Texas Refineries Worries Midwestern Farmers." "Germany Abandons Nuclear Power Program in Wake of Japanese Near-Meltdown." Energy issues are on our plate NOW, and promise to be ever more pressing in the years ahead. And Washington fiddles while the world burns!

Conservationists and environmental organizations should realize especially acutely the centrality and complexity of the energy stakes for both nature and society. Weaning humanity from fossil fuels is crucial, but alternative energy sources often are problematic also. Consider wind energy, in many ways a benign source. But as the Richfield Springs headline suggests, wind farms often are unpopular with those who live near them; moreover, as many DOAS members are aware, the big turbines of the Tug Hill wind farms east of Lake Ontario have proven lethal to bats and many migratory birds, raising fears of similar mortalities if wind towers are erected – as proposed – in the migration flyways of the golden eagles and other raptors we enjoy at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch. DOAS therefore has urged caution and prior research before windmills are erected - while at the same time opposing natural gas drilling in our state. Natural gas is potentially the "cleanest" and least climate-influencing of fossil fuels to burn, but the deep hydrofracking technology needed to extract it from our Marcellus and Utica shales carries many environmental and human health risks that have not yet been sufficiently addressed. Energy choices seem hard today, but they will be harder in the uncertain future. As conservationists, we must continue to make ourselves heard – and loudly. Here's hoping we can agree on what to say!

*Joe Richardson*



*Migrating Golden Eagle, by Dave Kiehm*

### THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

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

# Conservation and Legislation

**Hydrofracking—still Number One**—Time is running short on the public comment period for the pending environmental impact statement and regulations on hydrofracked gas drilling in New York State. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation is accepting comments on this document until December 12, and it is critically important that as many New Yorkers as possible make their voices heard.

In addition, DEC has announced the schedule for public hearings on the hydrofracking rules (see below). There no doubt will be a strong showing of opposition, but it also can be anticipated that gas drilling companies will do all they can to pack the hearings with leaseholders and others who stand to profit from the drilling pollution.

There is strong evidence that even with the strictest rules, hydrofracking poses significant dangers to ground water, including drinking water supplies—and also to surface waters which will be used as withdrawal sites for the immense quantities of fresh water required for this activity. In addition, the regulations allow open pit storage of drilling wastes and flowback fluids, posing a threat to birds and other wildlife. Drilling wastes and other materials such as pit liners can be disposed of on site under DEC's regulations. There are no extra safeguards for proper handling and disposal of radioactive wastes that are commonly found at drill sites.

The regulations gloss over the threats to habitat including critical grassland and large forested areas from disturbance and fragmentation by drilling construction and operations. DEC says it will require additional review in very limited areas—carried out by the drillers—and that 'mitigation' will be permitted for damage to habitat.

The rules continue to allow drilling companies to hide the chemicals used in fracking fluids from the public. The known chemicals include carcinogens, diesel fuel and other toxic materials.

There is no discussion or consideration of the long-term effects of leaving fractured geologic strata contaminated with fracking fluids and solids to keep the fractures open. These will remain for millennia—threatening future generations for short-term energy gains.

**What you can do**—Make sure that at a minimum you submit comments to DEC before December 12. (A link to all the documents is at [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)). Even a one page list of your concerns can be effective. DOAS' position is that this activity is fundamentally unsafe and environmentally unacceptable, regardless of regulations. You may want to take the same tack.

Some additional points to make:

- Wildlife is still at risk under the proposed regulations. There should be a clear and comprehensive ban on open storage of any wastes resulting from drilling and fracking—no exceptions. Also, a site specific assessment of the habitat impacts of every drilling location should be carried out by independent agents paid for by the drillers, but hired and overseen by DEC.
- Drillers should not be permitted to take water from water bodies within the Marcellus and Utica shale areas. This area will be overburdened by withdrawals from the large scale operations envisioned.
- The prohibited distance for drilling should be increased to one mile from water bodies, aquifers, public water supplies, and existing water wells and springs in order to protect these waters and public health.
- There should be full disclosure to the public of all chemicals used in drilling and fracking prior to approval of a well.
- The environmental impact statement should consider the long-term ramifications of fractured geology and remaining chemicals and other materials left underground.

If possible, try to attend and speak at one of the public hearings. The closest to our area are November 17: The Forum Theatre, 236 Washington St., Binghamton, NY; and November 29: Sullivan County Community College, Seelig Theatre, 112 College Rd., Loch Sheldrake, NY. Both will run from 1-4 and 6-9 PM.

In addition, the City of Oneonta and others have organized a local opportunity for public comment at 7 PM on November 10 in the Hunt Union Ballroom at the State University College at Oneonta. Although not an official hearing, all comments will be transcribed and submitted to DEC to become part of the official record.

*Andy Mason*

**This comment period is the last chance to have an impact on the state's rules for hydrofracking—an activity that could fundamentally change our home and our lives. Please take action!**



## Favorite Places

### Upper Otego Creek

The favorite place that I would like to share is upper Otego Creek. Upper Otego Creek meanders through a sheltered valley with woods, marshland and farmland. The section that I am most familiar with is north of the town of Hartwick. A large portion of the creek is accessible via a fishing/conservation easement.

The main attraction of Otego Creek for me is the presence of the increasingly rare native Brook Trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*). *Salvelinus* is an old European word referring to char. The Brook Trout is in fact in the char family along with the Arctic Char and Lake Trout. The venerable rainbow trout and cutthroat trout (both native to the Western U.S.) belong to the genus *Oncorhynchus*. This genus comes from the Greek *onkos* meaning hook and *rhyncos* meaning nose, referring to the hooked jaw, or kype, seen on males in the breeding season. Getting back to the Brook Trout, *fontinalis* derives from the Latin meaning from a spring or fountain, and these trout thrive in the cool, spring-fed water of Otego Creek.

Another unique aspect of Otego Creek is the abundance of aquatic insects. If one picks up any good size rock in the creek one will find caddisfly larvae and mayfly larvae. One will also find intermittent stonefly larvae-another sign of a pristine creek. Some readers may be unfamiliar with caddisflies aka Trichoptera (from the Greek *trichos* meaning hair and *pteron* meaning wing). These insects are one of the largest orders of aquatic insects

and originally evolved in cold-water streams. Perhaps one of the most interesting things about caddisflies is their diversity. Some caddisflies use nets to snare prey. Others build primitive rock cases. These cases have two openings and the caddis will pop its head out to forage. If one goes to Otego creek and turns over a few rocks, the number of caddisflies will surprise you. One will also see mayfly larvae, but these may be smaller or a little more secretive. However, if you find a stonefly you will know it. These insect larvae are large and aggressive-looking. Often they will have a yellowish hue. In the fly-fishing world the most famous stonefly is the salmonfly. This is a famous fly on western streams that commonly reaches three inches in length. Trout will go far out of their way to eat one of these energy-rich morsels.

Since this is the Audubon Society, one also needs to mention the birds of Otego Creek. In spring, our avian friends are ubiquitous. The most common birds would be kingfishers, yellow warblers and the common yellowthroat. Wood thrushes are also very common during Spring Evenings. Unfortunately, out east, we can't watch dippers picking off caddisfly larvae.

I have also seen numerous other animals on Otego Creek. For example, I have had the opportunity of seeing a box turtle lay eggs on the banks of the creek. Apparently, this is at the northern edge of their range. Growing up in northern Vermont I do not recall seeing any of these magnificent creatures. The architecture of their carapace is spectacular. Recently, I took an Indian friend fishing along the creek. We observed a large *Castor Canadensis* (beaver). He asked me if there was anything we needed to worry about. I re-assured him that they were much less harmful than a cobra despite their large teeth. *Eric Knight*



*Tom Knight with salmonfly, by Eric Knight*



Left to right: Tom Salo giving a hawk/eagle identification talk; Steve Hall scoping out an eagle; visitors get a look at incoming birds.  
Photos of the DOAS Open House by Julie Smith

## Hawkwatch News

The raptor migration season is progressing well at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch. We have seen our first Golden Eagles of the year, and Red-tailed Hawk numbers are climbing toward their late October/early November peak.

As of the third week of October, the total raptor count stood at 2784, about half of what we expect for an average full season. Thirteen Golden Eagles had been tallied, despite a lack of good northerly winds.

Other good numbers for this season include 120 Bald Eagles and 445 Sharp-shinned Hawks.

Franklin Mountain typically gets several triple-digit Red-tailed Hawk days each season, and they could come at any time. Good red-tail days are often productive for Golden Eagles also, and we

can expect at least two or three days with 10+, and possibly more.

The best flights are on north or northwest winds, often the day or two following passage of a cold front. Counters will be present each day except when rain grounds the hawks. These conditions necessitate warm clothing, so be prepared if you visit.

Visitors, spotters and counters are always welcome at the hawkwatch. For more information, contact:

Andy Mason, (607) 652-2162, [AndyMason@earthling.net](mailto:AndyMason@earthling.net), or Tom Salo, (607) 965-8232, [tomsalo@localnet.com](mailto:tomsalo@localnet.com)

Forecasts of anticipated good flights at the hawkwatch are sent out by email a day or two in advance. To receive these alerts, contact Andy Mason as above.

More information and directions to the hawkwatch at the DOAS Sanctuary can be found at [www.franklinmt.org](http://www.franklinmt.org)

### *DOAS Fall Field Trips (continued from page 1)*

of the educational program for October. Mike Burger, Director of Conservation for New York State Audubon, spoke at our annual Charter Dinner focusing on the importance of northern New York State habitat for migrating birds. Attempting to build upon this upcoming presentation a dozen brave birders outfitted in



*DOAS group hiking at Mountain Top Arboretum  
by Barbara Marsala*

rain gear went forth with the optimism of getting a view of the rare and not so rare migrants heading south to their wintering grounds. It was worth the drive and the sporadic lousy weather.

At the main entrance, we were treated to a pair of flying trumpeter swans flying very low over the grasses. A number of Ducks – Blue-winged teal, American Widgeons, Northern Shovelers, American Black Duck and Mallards were spotted. Further on around the drive, Coots, Blue Heron, Bald Eagles, Killdeer, Great Blue Heron and small group of Canada geese were present.

The next stop at May's Point Pool offered some great views of Great Egrets, alongside the Great Blue Heron. The silhouette of

these two birds together creates a beautiful picture. Common Mergansers were in view, Blue-winged teals, a Dunlin, Lesser yellow legs and an Osprey soaring, along with an adult Bald Eagle. Other birders there reported seeing the previous two days, the Black-Bellied Plovers. No, we didn't see them.

We moved on to the corner of the Onion fields heading toward the Knox-Marcellus Marsh/Puddler's Marsh, and were treated to a display of about two hundred Snow Geese flying and banking with about five hundred Canada Geese.

At the Knox-Marcellus Marsh/Puddler's, we spotted once again Canada Geese, a collection of Mallard, Blue-winged Teals, and a pair of Northern Harriers flying low over the Marsh, but giving us a great view for about ten minutes. We attempted to get to the lower roads, which were in horrible condition to get a closer view of the marshes. The first marsh was about as far as we could go and did see a close up view of a Double-crested Cormorant. Earlier in the week an American Avocet was spotted in that area, so we had of course pursued this with no luck.

One of our groups reported on the way out of Montezuma Northern Pintails and an adult Bald Eagle feasting on a rather large object. Probably one of the thousands of Canada Geese. A Pied-billed Grebe was reported with these sightings.

In the fall, Montezuma, reports about 60,000 Canada geese go through and that clearly was in evidence with our sightings. In the spring, it is estimated that 100,000 Snow geese go through and our experience from past spring trips has validated that.

SEE YOU IN THE SPRING for our return trip northward to Montezuma.  
*Eleanor Moriarty*



## Controlling Invasive Plants

Invasive species seem to be everywhere. Starlings, gypsy moths, purple loosestrife, knotweed, didymo, alewives, bush honeysuckle. More are heading our way. Invasive species threaten ecosystems and species. The more successful invasive plants grow explosively forming extensive monocultures. Natives that provide food and shelter for wildlife cannot compete.

You have probably noticed the purple prism traps hanging from ash trees along the roads. NYSDEC is using these to determine the distribution of emerald ash borer. This Asian species could effectively eliminate billions of ash trees from the landscape. These trees produce large quantities of seed that feed birds. They also have significant timber value. Asian longhorned beetles are another serious threat to our forest trees.



*Buckthorn fills the understory of a forest in Burlington. Larger buckthorns are about 15 feet tall, by Tom Salo*

I recently became aware of another invasive in our midst. About 7 or 8 years ago I noticed a shrubby tree growing around my property. I couldn't identify it. A couple of botanists said it was a buckthorn but they didn't know what kind. There are native and invasive buckthorns. A couple of years passed and the stuff started taking over the understory of my forest. I recently identified it as glossy buckthorn. It is fast growing and aggressive invasive. It produces copious amounts of seed in the form of purple berries. Birds spread the seeds but get very little nutrition from the berries due to a laxative effect.

The buckthorn grows so well in the understory, it completely

cuts off light to the forest floor, halting the regeneration of native trees. The result is long-term forest decline.

One problem with knowing what it is, now I'm seeing it everywhere. Our wetland property in Burlington is at risk. Areas recently opened by beavers there have many new buckthorns sprouting. It grows faster than any of the native species. Since most animals find the plant unsavory, there won't be forage for the next generation of beavers if it is left to grow.

How do we control it? Smaller plants pull out of the ground easily. However, disturbing the soil in this way makes a good seed bed. It encourages the growth of new buckthorns. If you cut the plant off near the ground, it comes back stronger with multiple trunks. It seems the only way to effectively kill it is with chemicals. I have an aversion to chemical solutions. However,

I have resorted to using herbicides in extreme situations to control invasive plants. The spread of garlic mustard in my forest was overwhelming all the native wildflowers in a 2 to 3 acre area.

I spent several spring seasons hand pulling. I was making no progress in spite of many hours and days spent at this labor. I couldn't devote the necessary time to the chore, and could not get every one. Garlic mustard seeds can last 5 years in the soil. Each spring, it seemed as many new plants sprouted as the year before. The only long-term solution was to prevent plants from going to seed. I broke down and started spraying. Since garlic mustard is a biennial that stays green through the winter, it can be killed the first year with glyphosphate in early October, when most native wildflowers are inactive. After a couple of years of precision spraying in the fall, success is evident. Areas that were once carpeted with young plants have almost none.

The few new plants can be easily pulled by hand. Wildflowers are growing where there had only been garlic mustard.

Now I need to get control of the Buckthorn. There are thousands of these on my property. It remains green longer than almost all our native plants, making it easy to find in early winter. At this time of year, a small amount of a specific herbicide around the base of the tree will kill it. This method and timing minimizes the amount of chemical used, and minimizes exposure of native vegetation to harmful chemicals.

It took me a long time to accept that I could not control these aggressive invaders without resorting to chemicals. I now believe that in cases of these really aggressive plants, herbicides can be the lesser evil.

*Tom Salo*

## Coming Activities

### November

**November 18 — DOAS Program:** *The Bald and Golden Eagles of the Catskills* by Scott VanArsdale, Wildlife Technician of NYS DEC since 1983 and a specialist in eagles since the mid-90's. Scott's presentation, featuring some of his vast collection of photos, will focus on the history and reintroduction of Bald Eagles and also include information about Golden Eagles in our area. 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 Program Chairman Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

### December

**December 6 — DOAS Board Meeting:** 7 PM at the home of Barbara Marsala.

**December 17 — Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society Annual Christmas Bird Count:** This is our 43rd year of participating in this national count. Everyone, novice or experienced, is welcome to join us on this 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 (607) 432-5767. People who have participated before will be contacted.

**December 30 — Fort Plain Christmas Bird Count:** This count is known for good species diversity. Habitats range from the Mohawk River and surrounding farm land to conifer forests in the Adirondack foothills. Consider helping with this fun and social event. All skill levels are welcome. There will be a pot-luck supper after the count. Contact Tom Salo at (607) 965-8232 or [tomsalo@localnet.com](mailto:tomsalo@localnet.com) for more information.

*The November and January programs will give educational information that will be useful for the January Eagle trip and the February Owl trip.*

### January

**January 15 — Waterfowl Count:** The 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 West Branch of the Delaware River. This effort involves surveying waterways where they can be seen, and identifying and counting ducks and geese. The totals are used by the Department of Environmental Conservation in managing these species over the upcoming year.

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

**January 17 — DOAS Board Meeting:** 7 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church.

**January 20 — DOAS Program:** *Short-eared Owls and Winter Raptors* by Jenny Murtaugh, NYS DEC Wildlife Technician. 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 Program Chairman Eleanor Moriarty at (607) 435-2054.

**January 21 — Annual Eagle Trip:** 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 AM. 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).

## 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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## September – October Bird Sightings

With my hummingbird feeders cleaned and safely put away for the approaching cold weather, I was able to get my regular birdfeeders ready for the new fall season. I stop feeding the birds in late spring and summer because of the proximity of my feeders to my raised bed vegetable gardens. About two hours after I filled them, Black-capped Chickadees, Dark-eyed Juncos, White-breasted Nuthatches, Mourning Doves and Blue Jays showed up. It was fun to welcome the return of my bird friends.

I got a nice telephone call in late September from Mary Morrison of Sidney. She had an exciting summer season of backyard bird watching. She eagerly witnessed the comings and goings of many bird species, but was particularly delighted by the repeated visits of Indigo Buntings in all their spectacular iridescent glory. Streaks of blue would catch her eye

as they darted here and there throughout her backyard.

On 10/14 a mixed flock of birds alit on some Norway Spruces on Tom Salo's property in West Burlington. On closer inspection many Black-capped Chickadees were traveling with a couple of Palm Warblers. Also on that day while Tom was mowing a field with a bush hog mower, a Common Raven spent several minutes flying over the newly mowed area intently studying the ground. The raven got quite close to the tractor a few times and Tom noted that it approached much closer to him than if he had just been walking around. He has observed this same foraging behavior while mowing from Red-tailed Hawks, but it was the first time a raven was acting in the same manner.

Just a little aside. If you haven't read the book *The Big Year* which is about a grand, grueling, expensive, and occasionally vicious, "extreme" 365-day marathon of



*Palm Warbler, by Dave Kiehm*

bird watching by Mark Obmascik, it is now a feature film starring Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson.

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