



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

Coming Activities

November

November 15 – Deadline: 2013

Audubon Adventures

November 16 – DOAS Program

December

December 8 – Field Trip -

Short-eared Owls

December 15 – Oneonta CBC

December 29 – Fort Plain CBC

January

January 12 – Eagle Field Trip

January 20 – Waterfowl Count

*More information
on page 7*

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

Christmas Bird Counts

Waves of Snow Buntings rolling over a winter meadow ... brightly-capped Redpolls feeding on catkins in leafless white birches... a lonely Hermit Thrush, fluffed up and huddled in a snow-encrusted bush... flocks of horned larks foraging in a frozen field. Winter birding brings different birds, different memories.

We invite you to see such sights, build new birding memories, and in the process become part of a 113 year tradition: the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). In the 1800s, many Americans used to take part in what was known as the “Christmas Side Hunt”, competing to see which party could shoot the most birds. In 1900, Frank Chapman, an ornithologist and member of the newly established National Audubon Society, suggested that rather than killing birds, folks should simply count them. That December, twenty-five Christmas Bird Counts were conducted, 18,500 birds counted. The 112th CBC last year included 2215 locations, with 62,624 participants tallying over 60 million birds. That’s a lot of birds not killed!

Christmas Bird Counts are conducted within circles with a 15 mile diameter. The circles are broken up into a number of regions, and a team is assigned to each region. Locally, there are two such circles: one around Oneonta, and one in Fort Plain. We would love to have you join us or one of the other teams in this winter tradition.

Many of our summer birds also winter in our area: Turkeys, Ruffed Grouse, Red-tailed Hawks, Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, and more. In milder winters, we might hear the welcome rattle of a Kingfisher, or see a stalking Great Blue Heron hunting a stream. It’s not unusual to find Robins and Bluebirds, as they are species that don’t migrate far. We also get northern birds that spend their winters in our (relatively) warmer climate, including Tree Sparrows, Evening Grosbeaks, and the occasional Northern Shrike.

One might think that the experience of birding each of our assigned areas would be very similar. They are, after all, separated by a mere 25 miles, as the crow flies. But geographical features can make a world of difference in attracting different species. It is in the Fort Plain area, with its expansive fields and low elevation, (continued on page 4)



Pine Grosbeaks, by Dave Kiehm

President's Message

Building an Informed Environmental Constituency



Involvement with DOAS represents a return to the Audubon family for me. A good portion of my early career was spent as an environmental educator and administrator with Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary, in Oyster Bay, NY, the first National Audubon Sanctuary in the US. At TR we worked closely with our local Audubon chapters to provide programming that focused on bird studies, banding programs (for songbirds, waterfowl and raptors), censusing, wildlife rehabilitation and education/outreach. Although I am not as involved with these activities as I was in years past, I retain a passion for them

which I hope to re-invigorate and share through my current involvement with DOAS.

My other natural history passion is for coastal environments and marine ecology. One of my favorite work experiences was as Education Director for Save the Sound, in Stamford, CT. Save the Sound is a Long Island Sound conservation organization whose three-fold mission includes education, research and advocacy. While there, I helped to produce a LI Sound watershed education curriculum for middle school science educators, complete with equipment provided for classroom use through grants. I also initiated estuary canoeing programs and quadrupled the number of students served through coastal ecology programs.

These experiences have taught me a great deal, but the most important lesson is that children thrive in a natural setting. Regardless of their classroom, in-school, or at-home behavior, the outdoor environment brings out children's natural inquisitiveness and excitement. Children are keen observers, and they see things that might not be immediately apparent to distracted adults. It could be a bug, a plant, a bird, a snake, a pile of feathers, a skull or bones of an animal, or a fish. The opportunities presented by a child's natural curiosity are by far the most effective teaching tool at our disposal.

Increased exposure to these experiences for children are the gateway to a greater interest in our environment, an understanding of how natural systems function, and the desire and passion to take personal responsibility through thoughtful decision-making. I believe that this is the foundation for our environmental future. Building an informed environmental constituency will be the determining factor for worldwide conservation efforts in the coming years.

With this in mind, I will be focusing my efforts on the Education and Outreach Committees, supporting adoption of the Audubon Adventures program materials in Delaware and Otsego schools (see complete information at doas.us) and implementing our annual Environmental Education grant program for educators.

I look forward to serving the organization to the best of my ability, and hope to work alongside the DOAS Board and Members to provide increased opportunities for multi-generational family experiences, providing children with field experiences alongside dedicated, environmentally-passionate adults. I welcome assistance and invite those interested to contact me by email at sjohandley@gmail.com.

~ Susan O'Handley



photo by John Davis

THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

AUDUBON SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1968

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To contribute notes or articles for

The Belted Kingfisher, email:
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Conservation and Legislation

Hydrofracking update—There has been some cautiously positive action on the hydrofracking front in recent weeks. In mid-September, Gov. Cuomo's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) announced plans to collaborate with the Department of Health (DOH) to undertake a review of the DEC's analysis of fracking's impacts on public health. Environmental groups had been calling for an independent and thorough health assessment of hydrofracking. The Cuomo administration's plans fall short of this, but do represent a willingness to more seriously consider human health effects before making a final determination on fracking. This also has the effect of delaying a decision until after the November elections, so may well turn out to be a political ploy.

The timing also means DEC will have to hold at least one more public hearing and comment period on their proposed hydrofracking regulations, giving opponents another opportunity to lay out the arguments against this dangerous practice.

What you can do—Watch for details on this new chance to weigh in on hydrofracking—and do so when the comment period and hearing are announced. Also, keep pressure on your town officials to ban hydrofracking. It may well be that if and when it is approved, towns that have opted out may be excluded by the state.

Maximizing your ecotourism dollars for conservation—If you are fortunate enough to be traveling to exotic climes for exotic birds, where you stay can make a difference in the well-being of both tropical species, and our summer resident that migrate south. Many lodges and preserves use the proceeds from hosting visiting birders to expand and enhance habitat—often in regions that are otherwise decimated by logging, agriculture and other unsustainable practices.

The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) has a web site that lists conservation birding sites that contribute to bird conservation in the Americas. The site, www.conservationbirding.org, highlights reserves that have been designed to support the long-term protection of habitat for rare birds, and is run by a local conservation group. According to ABC, when you visit, you know that the fees you pay contribute directly to the management of vital bird habitat.

The conservation birding site includes a Google Earth link displaying lodges and preserves that benefit birds. For example, the Cerulean Warbler Bird Reserve: "a fabulous 545 acre Colombian Oak forest reserve is a small but significant relict of a unique ecosystem that has been devastated across the Eastern Andes of Colombia." The reserve was established in 2005, with a 45 acre shade coffee farm added to establish a comfortable lodge

and develop Cerulean Warbler Conservation Coffee. The reserve now buffers the recently established Yariquíes National Park.

What you can do—If you are considering a birding adventure in the tropics, check the conservation birding site for possibilities that combine wonderful birds with habitat protection.

~ Andy Mason



"Pipeline im Bau" by btr, courtesy commons.wikimedia.org

DOAS Statement on Pipelines and Bird Habitat

In mid-September, the local business group Citizens Voice publicized a presentation on the benefits of wildlife from gas pipelines by an individual identified as an 'Audubon educator'. Our Chapter had no involvement in this presentation, and in order to avoid confusion, the board of directors issued the following statement:

"A news brief in the September 25, 2012 Oneonta Daily Star informed readers of a presentation to a local business group by an "Audubon Educator" speaking on the benefits to wildlife of gas pipelines, including benefits to "migratory songbirds". The Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society (DOAS), the local Chapter of the National Audubon Society, wants to clarify that this speaker has no connection with the organization, and that the views presented do not represent its opinions.

The Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society is opposed to the Constitution Pipeline and has submitted comments stating its concerns to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The construction and right-of-way of the pipeline will cause significant habitat changes, including fragmentation of forested areas. Although some bird species may benefit from such changes, these are species that have adequate habitat in the region. The interior forest birds that will lose habitat are among those already in serious decline. Construction and maintenance of the pipeline will only further threaten these at-risk species."

Feeder Personalities

Bird species mostly look quite different. Provisioning birds and being retired provide opportunities to see character differences too. Most always zooming about are the chickadees. They're 'all business' -- in and out of the oilseed feeder as expeditiously as possible. They don't hang-out. Up close they're more businesslike than cute. Titmice are pretty much like that too in the feeder, but also come to find peanuts, which they filch cautiously, or guiltily, seeming to feel that they really belong to the jays. They might pick one up, look about with those big eyes, drop it and flit away, to return if the coast is really clear. The jays of course, take over. Not only the peanuts but the birdseed on the bench too. These little bits they pick one at a time, jockeying with the doves, who try to shoo them away. The hen jays (slighter neck and shoulders) are the boldest and smartest. The doves (probably cocks) are tough, and mean: where did they ever get a rep for peace! One dove usually acts like the boss, spending as much time chasing the others as eating. A small flock might spend a whole afternoon scattered about the feeder area defined by a dying butternut that makes up most of the environment, sometimes even snoozing. Nuthatches go up and down in their own turf, getting an oilseed and scurrying up to a good place on the butternut to whack it open. Sometimes one might play 'butterfly', spreading its wings, facing down and turning left and right like a pendulum. Territorial display I think. Then we have the laid-back grosbeaks (rose-breasted in summer, purple in winter, cardinal always). They can get into the oilseed feeder, do so, and sit around leisurely picking one here, then one there, slowly filling the feeder with shells that dribble down the sides of their beaks. Others of their kind wait their turn, seemingly placid and patient. Rosy and purple hens look alike as well as being alike. The cardinal cock is the only one who shows affection for his mate, giving her tidbits, in season. On and off, a flock of goldfinches stop by and take oil seeds from the ports only, like good citizens in a row. In winter we have droves of juncos all over the place, quarreling endlessly, jostling like billiard balls. Then there are the occasional in-and-out folks, the brown thrashers and grackles (rarely a redwing male). They eat birdseed from the bench, but mostly pick stuff from the ground. The thrasher is always in a hurry, pick-picking here and there -- and there and out. But what is it that all kinds find on the ground? Sometimes the whole crowd gets down under the feeder pecking away. When I checked I couldn't see anything to eat at all! Then, not very often, an accipiter comes roaring in to crash the party, often leaving behind a calling card feather.

~ Stan Salthe

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society Annual Christmas Bird Count December 15

This is our 44th 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, within our designated 15 mile radius circle centered about at Milford, 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 within our circle. 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.

Christmas Bird Count (continued from page 1)

that we expect to find the attractive Redpolls, White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Cedar Waxwings, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and even a Mockingbird or Hermit Thrush. Here, too, is where flocks of Snow Buntings and Horned Larks might be found. Hawks, including Rough-legged and Northern Harriers, find good winter feeding - and are easier to find in the open area. As the light fades into evening, Short-eared Owls, sounding like small dogs barking, announce their presence as they hunt fields vacated by the hawks.

The approach to a CBC varies by the team. Some folks hike through snowy woods and meadows, some groups bird from their cars. The strategy we have adopted is to travel the roads of our territories, following a leapfrogging routine where one walks along, while the other drives ahead, then walks on and leaves the car for the follower. There is no expectation that a team will find all the birds in an area, or even count all that can be found: many quiet woodland species may go uncounted; large flocks of geese or buntings can only be estimated. But even such rough numbers, when compiled year after year for 112 years by citizen scientists, yield a clear outline of the population cycles, challenges faced, and bounties enjoyed by our feathered co-inhabitants.

A final question remains: why should anyone forego the comforts of home, perhaps by a fire with a hot beverage, to spend a day enduring freezing temperatures, biting winds, or possibly worse, just to count birds? The answer is this: it's all part of the tradition.

To participate:

Bob Miller, Oneonta CBC coordinator, at (607) 432-5767, or
Tom Salo, Fort Plain CBC coordinator, at (607) 965-8232.

~ Sandy Bright and Charlie Scheim

Hawk Watch News

The season is progressing well at the Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch. As of mid-October, the total count of raptors was over 3000, with the biggest push of Red-tailed Hawks yet to come.

Sharp-shinned Hawk numbers have been consistent through October, with a total of 450 so far. This small hawk has been in a long-term decline, but hopefully will surpass the 11-year average of 568 this season. Steve Hall had an excellent Sharp-shin day on Oct. 5, with 104 tallied, topping the previous daily high of 92 in 1992.

The first Golden Eagle of the season arrived on Oct. 12. The 11-year average is 179, so we should have plenty to go through the peak period of late October and early November.

Visitors are always welcome at the hawkwatch. 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.

For more information, contact:

Andy Mason, (607) 652-2162, AndyMason@earthling.net, or Tom Salo, (607) 965-8232, salothomas@gmail.com.

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.

Another Loss Caused by Our Weird Weather this Year?

How disappointing! I grumbled to myself as I took down my humming feeder on August 29th. It's usually left up until mid-September to catch the last few traveling birds, and I joke with my children about helping the hummers "bulk up" for their long trip south.

I did remember back in July other birders telling about the number of bees they were seeing at their feeders. I was seeing one or two pesky yellowjackets, but the hummers were still coming and starting their territorial buzzing of each other.

By mid-August, however, the yellowjackets were increasing in number and couldn't be discouraged. The hummers came more and more infrequently until not at all, while their feeder swarmed with yellowjackets.

Birders I've talked with blame this on the loss of many blossoms this spring and the drought that followed in this area. Was it another loss caused by our weird weather this year?

~ Bonnie Graves

2012 Hawk Watch Open House

Beautiful weather brought out a good crowd at the Open House on October 13. About 50 people watched hawks, participated in our identification workshop and walked the trails walk on a bright sunny day. The wonderful refreshments provided by the board were appreciated by all. Hawks were flying but the southerly winds kept them far from the ridge. The event always presents a good opportunity for the board to engage visitors, whether they are newcomers or members.



Photos of the Hawk Watch by Andy Mason

November Program

Pipelines and Fragmentation Impacts on Birds

Recently, DOAS has been engaged in an information campaign to counteract misinformation concerning the positive impact pipelines have on birds, in particular, Forest Birds. Therefore, we decided the November DOAS monthly program would present an excellent opportunity to educate the public with the facts. ,

Our November program on Friday, the 16th will be "*Pipelines and fragmentation impacts on birds*". Our speakers will be Andy Mason and Peter Fauth. Andy is DOAS conservation chair, co-president, and an expert on forest birds in particular. Peter Fauth is a Harwick College professor, and considered an expert on Wood Thrushes. Peter has done research on Wood Thrushes at Pine Lake, in Davenport.

The program begins at 7:30 PM at Elm Park United Methodist Church, Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Refreshments are served and it is free and open to public. For further information contact: Eleanor Moriarty, at 607-435-2054

John Adams, originally scheduled for November's program, will not be able to present due to a medical situation. We will re-schedule John's presentation in the future, when he has fully recovered.

What to do With That Beautiful Fresh Christmas Tree After the Holidays

Last January I tied our trimmed Christmas Tree to the pole of my bird feeder. It stands in the backyard where I can see it from my kitchen window. The birds loved it and I had a great time watching. When we had a heavy snowfall, the tree looked lovely and underneath the lower boughs, the birds found shelter as well



as dropped food. The tree stayed with us though early summer. The branches were rust colored ~ the birds didn't mind and the branches made for

great perches. Hanging different kinds of treats plus suet on the tree's branches made for moments of great entertainment.

~ Janice Downey



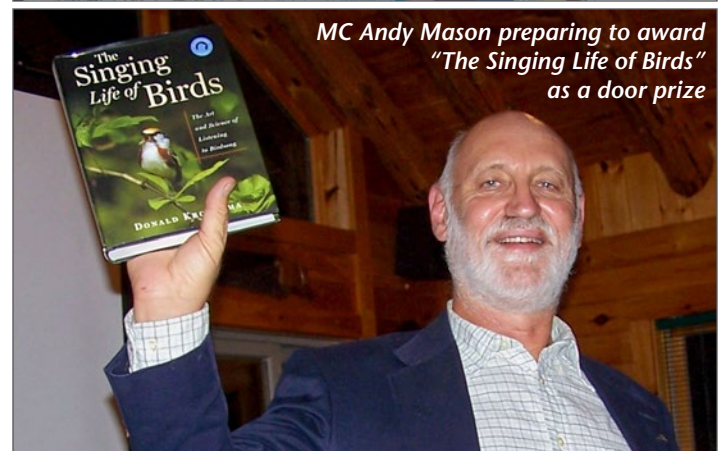
Cynthia Waterman



Raffle Winner



Frank Waterman



MC Andy Mason preparing to award "The Singing Life of Birds" as a door prize

Upcoming Activities

November

November 16 – DOAS Program: *Pipelines and Fragmentation Impacts on Birds* by Andy Mason and Peter Fauth. See details on page 6. 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 8 – Short-eared Owl Field Trip: DOAS will lead a field trip for owls and other late afternoon raptors, especially targeting Short-eared Owls. We will leave from the Cooperstown Cooperative Extension Office on Lake Road in Cooperstown at 3:00 PM. For information contact Bob Donnelly at (607) 264-8156 or rsdonn@yahoo.com.

December 15 – Oneonta Christmas Bird Count (CBC): Contact Bob Miller at (607) 432-5767.

December 29 – Fort Plain Christmas Bird Count (CBC): Contact Tom Salo at (607) 965-8232.

January

January 12 – Eagle Field Trip: Visit rivers and reservoirs in Delaware County where birds concentrate to feed. Recent trips have turned up 20+ eagles. Other raptors and waterfowl are usually sighted on this trip.

Meet at Dietz St. parking lot across from the YMCA at 7:30 AM; participants can be picked up en route in Delhi and Walton. We will stop at a local restaurant for lunch for interested participants. Return to Oneonta mid- to late afternoon. Contact Andy Mason (607) 652-2162, AndyMason@earthling.net for details.

January 20 – Waterfowl Count: The NY State Ornithological Association's annual statewide waterfowl count is scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 20, 2013. DOAS covers Otsego Lake and the Susquehanna River above Unadilla, the Unadilla River, and Cannonsville Reservoir and the W. Branch of the Delaware River. This effort involves surveying waterways where they can be seen, and identifying and counting ducks and geese. 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.

DOAS Offers Classroom Education Kits for 2013

Educators of children grades 3-6 (in Delaware and Otsego Counties) can apply for enrollment in the 2013 Audubon Adventures between now and November 15, 2012.

Complete details about the program, curriculum and materials are available online at the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society website at doas.us.

To apply, contact Susan O'Handley, Education Committee Chair via email at info@doas.us or sjohandley@gmail.com or by phone at 607-643-5680.

Funding support is available for this program.



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.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____



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September–October Bird Sightings

I had such a treat on my way home from one of life's domestic chores, going to the dump. About three miles from my house I spotted a mature bald eagle perched in a tree overlooking East Plattner Brook. I immediately stopped and turned the car around to get a better look with binoculars. Of course as I opened the door, the bird was spooked. Regretting the loss of a "good look" at a bald eagle, I once again turned the car around. To my delight and surprise before my very eyes I was thrilled to see two mature bald eagles soaring and flying nearly in tandem against a bright blue sunny sky.

On 9/18 Flo Loomis eagerly watched 4 Rufous-sided Towhees, 3 males, 1 female, in Mt. Vision. They were joined by a solitary Brown Thrasher and then a male Northern Cardinal decided to add himself to the mix. It made for a pretty picture. The bird activity in Leslie Preston's yard in Oneonta was in high gear on 9/21. Her usual sighting of 2 or 3 American

Robins was exceeded by about 30 of them on that day. What a show! A friend of Marilyn Huneke saw a Double-crested Cormorant leisurely swimming in the Delaware near Fitches Bridge in Delhi on 9/22. This sighting turned into a great photo op! There was an Eastern Bluebird bonanza at Joe and Alice Richardson's in Morris on 9/24. According to Joe a bevy of bluebirds, which he defines as at least a dozen, invaded the back yard and the area around their barn. The group contained both juveniles and adults and was joined by a Common Yellowthroat and a Gray Catbird.

On 10/2 Sandy Bright, who had left her hummingbird feeder out just in case, was delighted to see a Ruby-throated Hummingbird in Oneonta at this late date. On the 8th with still no killing frost at her farm on Elk Creek Road in Delhi, Marilyn Huneke saw a Pileated Woodpecker and due to the mild weather some hanger-on American Robins. With overnight temperatures in the low 20's on Oct. 10th, Joe Richardson heard a big whistle of White-throated Sparrows,



more than a dozen, scratching under his feeder. That same day my husband Gerry Cahill watched 2 Yellow-rumped Warblers flit around our locust tree in Treadwell. On 10/16 Jeffrey Murray watched an immature Red-headed Woodpecker at his feeder in Fly Creek while a Downy and Hairy showed great deference to the young one. 10/17 was a great bird sighting day. Eleanor Moriarity saw a Great Blue Heron, a Belted Kingfisher and flocks of Wild Turkeys in Davenport Center. Andy Mason observed a couple of Pine Siskins mixed with other finches in Jefferson. Charlie Scheim watched 3 White-crowned Sparrows at his feeder area in Oneonta and Marge Mathis saw 2 female Evening Grosbeaks feast on sunflower seeds strewn below her feeder in Morris. So ends another exciting bird month!

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