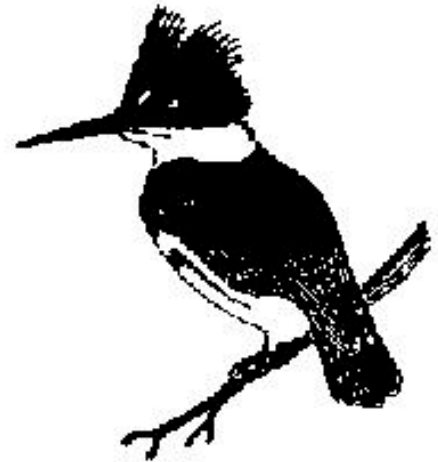


THE BELTED KINGFISHER



DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

FOUNDED 1968  P.O. BOX 544, ONEONTA, NY 13820

Volume 38, Number 7, September 2006

Guest Editor: John Davis

COMING ACTIVITIES

September 15:	General Meeting 7:30 PM. See below.
September 19:	Board Meeting 7:00 PM, home of Stephen Rice.
September 21:	Wind power and wildlife discussion 7:00 PM. See page 5.
September 29-October 1:	New York State Ornithological Association Meeting. See page 3.
October 14:	Open House DOAS Sanctuary 10 AM-2 PM. See page 4.
October 20:	General Meeting 7:30 PM. Program will be in Oct. Kingfisher.
October 17:	Board Meeting 7:00 PM, home of Tom Salo.
November 17:	DOAS Charter Dinner, Oneonta Country Club. See page 3.

September 15 General Meeting: "Summer Songbirds... and Some 'r' Not!"

As the breeding season ends and young fledglings are testing their wings, there is much to see in upstate New York - and identification of these beauties is not always easy! Richard Guthrie will attempt to take the mystery out of identification with his slideshow of birds commonly found in our area. Richard is a lifelong birder, retired from the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation. With 30 years of bird banding experience, he's surely seen a lot! His slides will cover three basic areas: close-up photos of banded birds (and stories to accompany); a "parade of beauties" (photos of the warblers of our area); and a segment on challenging I.D's (immatures, females, and fall plumage birds).

The program is scheduled for Friday, September 15, at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park Methodist Church at 401 Chestnut St. in Oneonta. It is free and open to the public, and refreshments will be served. For further information contact John Davis at davi7js4@hughes.net or 607-547-9688

DOAS PRESIDENCY CHANGES HANDS

At the September 22 meeting of your Board of Directors, Tom Salo was elected President of DOAS, following Barbara Marsala's decision to step down after serving in the role for the past four years. The Board lauded Barbara's outstanding work in carrying DOAS forward on so many fronts during her tenure. Fortunately for all of us, she has agreed to remain on the Board of Directors! As for Tom, we are again fortunate to have a person of his caliber, dedication and drive at the helm! John Davis will replace Tom as Secretary; there are no other changes in the officers or directors (see list on the back page).

CONSERVATION AND LEGISLATION

by Andy Mason

Oneonta biomass environmental review continues—The wood-burning biomass electric generating plant proposed to be built in the Oneonta rail yards has received a positive declaration under the State Environmental Quality Act. This means that the lead agency—in this case the City of Oneonta Planning Commission—has determined that the project will have a significant environmental impact, and that a full review must be done.

The Roundhouse Renewable Energy plant would generate 35 megawatts of power, enough for 35,000 homes. The developer states that the plant will burn about 1,100 tons of wood chips a day, coming from existing logging operations, waste construction lumber, and possibly from fast-growing tree plantations.

A number of environmental concerns have been raised, including the use of up to 360,000 gallons of cooling water per day. This may come from the Oneonta municipal water supply, from wells drilled on site, or from the Oneonta wastewater plant as treated wastewater. Emissions from the plant are expected to be similar to those from 10 or so wood stoves.

Disposal of the cooling water is also an issue. At present the developer plans to discharge it into on-site wetlands, which drain to the Susquehanna River.

Removal of wood that would otherwise be left to biodegrade in the forest could reduce the health of the remaining trees and lower habitat quality for wildlife.

Other issues such as noise, lighting, increased traffic, visibility, etc. have been voiced by city residents.

Ideally the environmental impact statement will expand on these issues and others. It also will look at alternatives to the plant, such as fossil fuel generation, which almost certainly has greater impacts than biomass, including higher greenhouse gas emissions.

What you can do—Stay informed, and participate in the public portion of the environmental review. Comments and opinions can be made now to the City of Oneonta Planning Commission, c/o City Clerk

James Koury, City Hall, 258 Main St., Oneonta, NY 13820. City residents can make their views known to their alderman.

New tax benefit for land easements—Although the 2006 NY State legislative session was unproductive in terms of passing the hoped-for Super Bills—including wetland protection, inclusion of non-carbonated beverages under the deposit law, and establishment of a community preservation fund—one little-noticed bill did get through that may have significant impacts on open space preservation in the state.

This legislation provides owners of land protected by a permanent conservation easement with an annual income tax credit equal to 25% of their property taxes. This gives landowners even greater incentive to protect their properties for the future by transferring development rights to land trusts, government, or other non-profits. Until now, tax benefits for these forward-looking individuals had been minimal at best.

The reduction in property taxes does not burden local municipalities, as the credit comes after landowners pay their local taxes. The new tax credit will be available after the state Department of Taxation and Finance promulgates regulations to carry it out.

What you can do—If you presently have land protected by a conservation easement, watch for announcement of the availability of the tax credit. If you would like to be sure your land stays undeveloped and natural for the future, contact a land trust for more information on this valuable tool. Local land trusts include the Otsego Land Trust, otsegolandtrust.org, (607) 547-2366; and the Schoharie Land Trust, schoharielandtrust.org, (518) 875-6892.

SUMMER BIRD SIGHTINGS It's been a busy and active birding season. On 5/16 Sue Whitney spotted a black-billed cuckoo in Delhi. The next day Tom Salo reported a great-crested flycatcher in W. Burlington. On 5/24 John Birkett sighted greater yellowlegs, a solitary sandpiper and a semi-palmated plover in Bainbridge. On that same day Tom Salo saw Eastern wood peewees in W. Burlington. On 5/25 Trina Bassoff reported an alder flycatcher in Blenheim and Charlie Dahan saw an indigo bunting and a pileated woodpecker in Otego. Charlie also saw a bald eagle catching fish in Portlandville on 7/17. On 7/26 Kay Crane reported 9 ruffed grouse in Walton. Tom Salo was surprised to see 15 American kestrels flying about and interacting with one another on 7/28 in Burlington. On 8/7 Bob Donnelly spotted a pair of Northern harriers and a sedge wren in Cooperstown. On 8/8 he reported a Henslow's sparrow there. •••Please send sightings to Dianne Benko at (607) 829-5218, at 6815 Co. Hwy 16, Delhi, NY 13753 or at caged@wpe.com by 9/17/06 for the October issue of *The Belted Kingfisher*.

SANCTUARY OPEN HOUSE

DOAS will hold its annual Open House on Saturday, October 14, 2006 from 10AM to 2PM, at our Sanctuary on Franklin Mountain. Hawk watching, a trail walk and a hawk identification workshop for beginners are scheduled. Refreshments will be available at the barn. The DOAS Sanctuary is the home of the Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch - one of the best locations in the Northeast for fall migrations of Red-tailed Hawks and Golden Eagles. Our dedicated volunteers record thousands of raptors each season. Fall of 2005 brought more than 5000 birds past the site. This included two eastern continental records for Golden Eagle - the most in a day and for a count season. An astounding 71 Golden Eagles were recorded on November 11 by Ron Milliken and Steve Hall. Those birds helped push the seasonal total to 252. The hawk watch started its 18th year of counting on August 20th.

One of the long time Franklin Mountain hawk watchers will conduct a 45 minute beginner's workshop called "Identifying Flying Hawks" at 10:30, focusing on the species typically seen in the area. The ID workshop can be complimented by the immediate use of the newly acquired skills at the hawk watch, which will be staffed through the day.

The trail walk will start at 11:30AM sharp. For more information contact Andy Mason 607-652-2162, andymason@earthling.net or Tom Salo at 607-965-8232, tomsalo@localnet.com.

DOAS AND WIND POWER

Locally, speculators are showing an increasing interest in the potential to generate power from wind. At our March meeting, the Board of Directors passed a resolution in support of wind power. While we do support renewable energy as an alternative to fossil fuels and nuclear energy, our support is qualified. Out of the many wind projects that have been studied, a few poorly sited wind farms have had a serious impact on birds. Since areas where raptors concentrate are often the best places for wind development, we are concerned about the thousands of raptors that move through here each fall, including record numbers of Golden Eagles. Away from the DOAS Sanctuary we don't know what ridges raptors follow but we expect developers to do the research necessary to protect the birds before building a project.

Since passing the resolution in March, we have offered our help and expertise on wind issues to 74 towns in the area, submitted extensive comments on a 75 turbine project just north of US Route 20, and made formal presentations to 2 towns in Delaware County.

Our research into the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Jordanville project expanded our education on wind projects. That area doesn't seem to have the geography to concentrate raptors like our local ridges, but it does have very high quality grassland bird habitat. This is an area we have discussed proposing to National Audubon as an Important Bird Area. One reason being the winter congregations of Short-eared Owl that are found very close to the project. If you have been on a DOAS trip looking for owls north of Route 20, you have been very close to the project area.

The comments we submitted chastise the developers and their avian consultants for failing to fully research the avian use of the area. They did check existing databases and acknowledged the quality of the habitat and the possible impacts to that habitat. However, they failed to contact any birders who know the area. They made many assumptions in an effort to discount the possibility that significant numbers of raptors move through the area. They knew nothing of the use of the area by a NYS Endangered Species - Short-eared Owl. As part of the environmental review process, DOAS has called for much more research before the project proceeds. We have asked that the developer be required to establish and endow a reserve area for grassland birds, an area equal in size to that impacted by the project. We have also asked that farmers who benefit financially from the project alter their practices to favor birds. Audubon New York has written in support of many of our comments. We will remain involved in this project as the process continues. ••• See www.doas.us, under Conservation and Environment, for full text of our position on wind power and other wind-power references.



Just how efficient is wind power?

Opponents of wind power often cite its inefficiency. There are the energy costs of building the components, erecting the machines and most of all the inherent variability of the wind. Some say the back-up coal plants simply can't ramp up or down quickly enough to effect a meaningful change in their output. But is this true? There must be at least some decrease in fossil-fuel output for a given level of energy put out by the grid. What do our readers think? John Davis

Opening the Fall Raptor Migration Season at the Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch

Sunday, August 20 was the annual work day at the Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch to prepare for and officially open the fall migration season. The work included repositioning some of the numbered observation-helper signs, installing the owl decoy on top of the kiosk, bolting the telescope mounts to the wooden posts, correcting the compass orientation on the weather station and removing a few trees that each year tend to obscure more of the critical view to the north. After the morning mists cleared it was a gorgeous day. And, oh yes, the first raptor of the season, a Broad-winged Hawk, was spotted and duly recorded as the official first migrator for the fall of 2006.



The work crew L to R: Ron Milliken, John Davis, Fred Reckner, Tom Salo, Steve Hall. The Hawk Watch shelter is at right.



Steve Hall and Ron Milliken scan the skies for the first migrating raptor of the season

Discussion Planned: On Thursday September 21 Tom Salo will lead a discussion of wind power and wildlife impacts at Pine Lake. The talk will follow immediately after a 7 PM potluck dinner. For information: 607-965-8232 or tomsalo@localnet.com

An Afternoon of Identifying Dragonflies

On August 6th, eight adults and four children were enthralled when NY Audubon's Dragonfly expert Larry Federman led a hands-on workshop at the DOAS Franklin-Mountain Sanctuary to capture and identify odonates, aka dragonflies and damselflies. These fascinating but under-appreciated insects have been around for over 300 million years, playing a key role in the ecological fabric particularly of wetlands. Now, with rising concerns about their ability to survive in the modern world of fragmented habitats and other human interference, the activity was part of a statewide "citizen science" project for the ongoing NYS Dragonfly and Damselfly Survey, similar to the recently completed NYS bird census.



Larry Federman leads dragonfly netters at the marsh



I've learned how to hold a live dragonfly!

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society
PO Box 544
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Membership Application

Membership in the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society includes 9 issues of our newsletter, *The Belted Kingfisher*. Cost is \$12 for a one year membership and \$20 for two years. Please make check payable to DOAS.

All meetings are free and open to the public. Mail checks to: DOAS Membership Chair, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544, with name, address and phone.

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

NAME _____

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To contribute notes or articles for *The Belted Kingfisher*, please send to: *Kingfisher* Editor, DOAS, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544.