



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

Coming Activities

February

February 7 – Golden Eagle Count

February 13-16: Great Backyard Bird Count

February 17 – Board Meeting

February 20 – Program: Hiking the John Muir Trail

March

March 17 – Board Meeting

March 20 – Program: Ravens

April

April 4 – Waterfowl Trip

April 17 – Program: Golden Eagles

April 21 – Board Meeting

May

May 2 – Family Program

May 19 – Board Meeting

June

June 6 – Family Program

June 7 – Birds, Brunch, Beer

More information on page 7

Fell Birds

*"Pale was the wounded knight
That bore the rowan shield,
Loud and cruel were the raven's cries
That feasted on the field,"*

And feast they have. For millennia scavenging birds have stripped the meat from bones of man and beast alike. The revulsion and hatred Europeans felt for some of these birds seem like reasonable reactions. The birds ate man flesh. It didn't help that many species – ravens in particular - are black, a color associated with death and evil.

However, not all people were repulsed by scavenging birds. The Zoroastrians sent their dead into the sky in the crops of vultures. That was until all the south Asian vultures died from eating the veterinary drug diclofenac. A recent news report of a woman having been consumed in 25 minutes by Griffon Vultures after falling from a cliff in the Pyrenees may make you queasy. Personally, I'm fascinated.



I've spoken to a number of friends who would like to have a custom such as the Zoroastrians' available here. Instead of being interred, they would like to have a "sky burial", to have their remains carried off by eagles, ravens and vultures. Unfortunately, our government won't allow it. The nutrients in our bodies must be burned or buried, depriving the landscape of the fertilizer in the huge human biomass. We would need to start a new religion and claim First Amendment protection to make it happen.

(Continued on page 4)

DOAS 2015 Education Initiative

As we head into 2015, DOAS is moving forward with a solid plan for environmental education initiatives. In order to grow our next generation of conservation leaders, we must continue to invest in providing environmental education and outdoor learning experiences. A greater understanding of biology and natural ecosystems leads to sound decision-making for our future environment. Our board is happy to support the following programs this year.

Environmental Education Internships

To assist us in extending our outreach to educators and students in our region, we are working closely with two Environmental Education interns this year from Hartwick College, Julie Opdyke and Allison Homler:

Julie is a senior Biology Major and Environmental Science and Policy minor who is working on development of a classroom program that will be presented to students in the Oneonta School District later this spring. *"Working on Environmental Outreach in schools with the DOAS is a wonderful opportunity for me. I get to spread knowledge of things I am very passionate about to my community, and teach young students to love and appreciate nature."*

Allison is a freshman Biology Major who is working to produce an Educator Resources section on the DOAS website with a particular focus on curriculum materials and activities on Raptors and Wind Energy topics for all grade levels. Allison possesses a passion for learning about animals and passing that knowledge down to younger generations. *"This internship will allow me the ability to combine my two passions of animals and education."* DOAS hopes to work with Allison throughout her college career at Hartwick.

Earth Festival 2015

Earth Festival celebrates it's 10th Anniversary this year! DOAS will again be in attendance with our traditional pre-festival bird walk and an expanded exhibit that will include children's activities led by our Hartwick College interns. We will also have information available about DOAS Activities including our NY Golden Eagles Research Program, and will have our usual retail items available for sale including Birds and Beans certified Eco-Friendly Coffee.

Environmental Education Grants for Educators

DOAS will begin accepting applications this February for the 2015 Environmental Education grants to educators in our region (Delaware, Otsego, eastern Chenango, and western Schoharie Counties). This competitive grant program is also available for Home School Programs as well as Student Service Organizations. These grants enable educators in our region to add new environmental and conservation focused activities to their curriculum or to continue existing initiatives. The number of awards and grant amounts are determined based on funds available and the number of qualifying proposals received.

Please help us spread the word about this opportunity to teachers you might know!

(Continued on page 4)



Pond Study Day at DOAS Day Camp Program,
Photo by Megan Gigandet

THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

AUDUBON SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1968

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To contribute notes or articles for
The Belted Kingfisher, email:
editor@doas.us

Conservation and Legislation

Constitution Pipeline—still time to weigh in—The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has extended the comment period on permits for the Constitution Pipeline until February 27. Constitution needs permits for stream crossings, wetland disturbance and air quality before it can proceed.

DOAS submitted comments to DEC—these can be found at www.doas.us. Our submission included impacts to birds from disturbance of waterways, and emphasized the importance of wetlands for birds and other wildlife.

The pipeline will cross over 200 waterways along its route, making it one of the largest projects impacting water quality in our region and the state. In addition, Constitution will withdraw millions of gallons of water from area rivers to pressure test the pipes. This will stress fish and other aquatic organisms in these waterways.

What you can do—It is important that DEC hear from the public in its consideration of these permits. Please let the agency know that the impacts from this construction are too great to our state's natural resources. As the DOAS comments put it, *"In our view, the impacts on birds and other wildlife brought on by pipeline construction and operation, along with an array of other threats to wetlands, streams and aquifers, and the effects of massive water withdrawals demonstrate that the permits sought for the Constitution Pipeline should not be issued."*

Comments can be submitted to:

Stephen M. Tomasik,
DEC - Division of Environmental Permits,
625 Broadway, 4th Floor, Albany, NY 12233-1750;
or by email to: constitution@dec.ny.gov

More background information is available through Stop the Pipeline, www.StopThePipeline.org.

Endangered Species killers need prosecution—A little known and decades old Department of Justice policy is protecting the killers of endangered grizzly bears, Whooping Cranes, California Condors and wolves.

The so-called "McKittrick Policy" was enacted after a Montana man gunned down a wolf and later claimed he had thought he was firing on a dog. He was prosecuted, though the Department of Justice (DOJ) later decided to accept his self-exoneration by claimed ignorance and has clung to that policy of inaction for years.

More recently, a radio-collared female wolf that had walked over 500 miles from Wyoming to Utah was shot and killed. The Utah hunter has told authorities he believed he was firing on a coyote when he opened fire on the wolf.

Killing an endangered species is a criminal act. This non-enforcement policy is having real world negative impacts and must be changed. Courts have upheld that the government does not need to demonstrate that the accused intended to "take" a protected species, only that (s)he did. However the current policy prevents prosecutors from carrying through these cases.

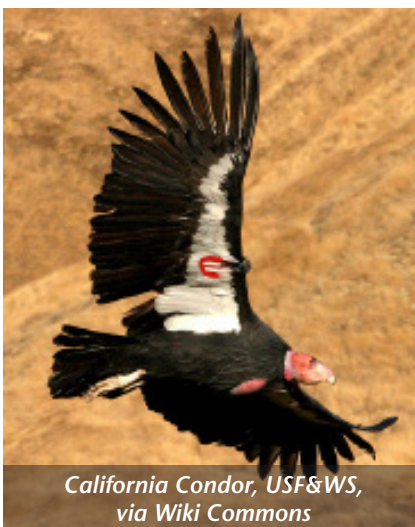
What you can do—Contact President Obama and Attorney General Holder to let them know that the policy of giving those who kill endangered species a free ride must end. Tell them that endangered species need to be protected from hunters that simply claim they did not know what they were shooting at.

President Barack Obama
The White House, Washington, DC 20500
Phone: (202) 456-1111 Fax: (202) 456-2461
www.whitehouse.gov/contact/

Eric Holder, Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice,
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20530.

Email: AskDOJ@usdoj.gov

~ by Andy Mason



California Condor, USF&WS,
via Wiki Commons



Gray Wolf, By Carlos Delgado (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Fell Birds (Continued from page 1)

I've been watching ravens feed on my property for years, ever since we started camera trapping eagles. I never grow tired of them. I still haven't gotten entirely used to their presence. Raven noise and Adirondack memories are closely joined in my mind. Like an old forgotten smell, their calls bring me back to a time when I only saw or heard them in the Adirondacks.

These days, when our winter bird feeding activities include putting out tons of meat, ravens are both a blessing and a curse. Large numbers are a blessing because they attract the eagles. An eagle can see an "unkindness" of ravens from miles away, alerting them to food. Ravens are a joy to watch, pairs of young birds wheel around and interact. They soar.

They glide. They barrel roll. The young males do bizarre things to impress the females.

They are a curse because they are "ravenous". They eat a lot, however, what they eat each day is only a small part of the problem. In a natural situation, a carcass in winter is an

ephemeral thing. It won't last. Ravens are smart. They take as much food as they can carry and hide it away for the future, saving it for a time when that carcass is nothing but skin and bones. Forty or fifty ravens carrying off meat to cache can strip a deer in several hours. This makes it difficult to keep the eagles fed. I'm a strict bird feeder. I limit the ravens to one deer a day.



Ravens from camera traps in the area

When I go to France, I get to see different scavenging birds at work, including several kinds of vultures. None of three vulture species I have encountered there are common but there are high densities of Griffon Vultures in some areas. It is easy to understand how scores of 20 pound scavengers could consume a person quickly. It is much harder to understand how these large birds manage to keep

themselves fed most of the year.

Carion birds provide a valuable service. They are nature's clean up crew. They are incredibly efficient fliers and wonderfully adapted for what they do. Enjoy them.

— Tom Salo

Tom Salo will present a program on Ravens on March 20

DOAS 2015 Education Initiative (Continued from page 2)

Details and application are available on the website at: doas.us/education/environmental-education-grants

Audubon Adventures "Digital Plus" Curriculum Materials for Educators

The "digital plus" subscription for curriculum materials is available at no charge to educators of grades 3-6 from schools, home school providers and service organizations within the DOAS operating area while funds remain available. Requests should be made by email to Susan O'Handley, Education Chair at sjohandley@gmail.com. This year's topic is *Birds, Bees, and Neighborhood Biomes* and includes both student and teacher materials (digital and print) with correlations to Common Core ELA and Science standards.

Complete information can be found at the DOAS Website at: doas.us/education/audubon-adventures-classroom-curriculum

Saturday Family Programs at the DOAS Sanctuary at Franklin Mountain

These Saturday morning programs provide an opportunity for families to explore the DOAS Sanctuary through some guided activities with Educator and DOAS Summer Program Director, Meghan Gigandet. Pre-registration is required by email to Susan O'Handley, Education Chair at sjohandley@gmail.com.



Tree Planting Project, South Kortright School, by Eileen Kline

\$4 per child fee/adults are free. Dates for this Spring are Saturday, May 2, Plant and Tree ID and Saturday, June 6, Wild Edibles.

2015 Summer Day Camp Program

To provide a richer experience for children in our summer day camp program, we will be expanding to provide two programs this summer, one for students ages 7 to 9 and a second for students ages 10-12. Registration information will be available in early spring and enrollment will be closed when filled. Partial and full scholarships are available.

We continue to seek local businesses that might like to partner with DOAS to support these initiatives. If you know of a business that is interested, please ask them to contact Susan O'Handley, Education Chair at sjohandley@gmail.com or by phone at 607-643-5680.

Susan O'Handley

Waterfowl Count Results

Results of the DOAS section of the NY State Ornithological Assoc. annual waterfowl count, Jan. 17 and 18, 2015; W. Branch Delaware R. Delhi to Deposit, including Cannonsville Res.; Otsego Lake and tributaries and surrounding ponds; Susquehanna River, Cooperstown to Unadilla; Ouleout Cr. to E. Sidney Lake; Unadilla R. and tributaries, Sidney to New Berlin; Canadarago Lake and tributaries:

Pied-billed Grebe	1
Canada Goose	1108
Gadwall	1
Mallard	1356
Am. Black Duck	246
Northern Pintail	17
Ring-necked Duck	4
Hooded Merganser	51
Common Merganser	98
Am. Coot	48
Total	2930

Other species of interest included Great-blue Heron, Bald Eagles, Sharp-Shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawks, Rough-legged Hawk, Am. Kestrel, Ruffed Grouse, Wild Turkeys, Belted Kingfishers, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Common Ravens, Horned Larks, Am. Robin, Pine Siskins, muskrat.

Thanks to participants Matt Albright, Andrew Conklin, Kay Crane, John Davis, Bob Donnelly, Bill & Lisa Gorn, Becky Gretton, Kathy Griswold, Eric Knight, Carol Lynch, Randy Lynch, Andy Mason, Nanda Methuku, Katie Ray, Tom & Joanne Salo.

Andy Mason



Northern Pintail via WikiCommons

Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch Wrapup

The 2014 season came to an end on Jan. 2 at the Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch—the 26th continuous year of counting at this site. Three raptors were recorded under overcast skies on light to moderate westerly winds. An adult Golden Eagle passing at 2:05 PM was the last bird of the season.

Counting began on Aug. 19, and continued on 109 dates, totaling 643 hours of coverage. Total raptors tallied was 4981 of 15 species, 6% below the 12 year average since full time counting began. Most species were down, with only Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, and Broad-winged Hawk showing in above average numbers.

The high single day total came Sept. 17 with 464 birds, of which 427 were broad-wings. Double-digit Golden Eagle days came on Nov. 2 and Dec. 1, with 14 each date. GE total for the season was 147, down from the site average of 172.

Thanks go to the dedicated volunteer team of counters: Andy Cooper, Larry Dake, Fred Fries, Becky Gretton, Andrea Lodovice, Andy Mason, Ralph Niederlander, Tom Salo, with a special shout out to stalwart Steve Hall who covered nearly half of the dates, as he has for many years. Much appreciation also for the spotters and supporters who helped out this year.

Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch 2014 Season Totals

Turkey Vulture	414
Osprey	126
Bald Eagle	157
No. Harrier	68
Sharp-shinned Hawk	548
Cooper's Hawk	103
No. Goshawk	22
Red-Shouldered Hawk	57
Broad-winged Hawk	1453
Red-tailed Hawk	1957
Rough-legged Hawk	9
Golden Eagle	172
Am. Kestrel	102
Merlin	25
Peregrine Falcon	16
Unidentified Raptor	47

Total **5276**

Andy Mason

Genomic Sequencing Breakthrough

In December, a remarkable consortium of more than 200 scientists from 20 countries released the results of an enormous cooperative research endeavor - the mapping of an expansive avian family tree that demonstrates how birds evolved their amazingly colorful feathers, lost their teeth, learned to sing, and how their brain circuitry functions.

Members of the project, named the Avian Phylogenomics Consortium, published their family-tree findings in eight different papers in the journal *Science*, and also in more than 20 other scientific journals. No one had ever before used so much genome data from so many species to determine evolutionary relationships.

This project has re-arranged what we know about birds and has revealed unexpectedly close family relationships. For example the study clearly established that falcons are more closely related to

parrots than to eagles or vultures (neither Old World nor New World vultures), and that flamingoes are actually evolutionarily and genetically closer to pigeons than they are to pelicans!

"It's mind-blowing," said Per Ericson, an evolutionary biologist at the Swedish Museum of Natural History in Stockholm.

According to an article by Ian Sample in *The Guardian*, an analysis of the genomes indicated that the common ancestor of living birds lost its teeth more than 100 million years ago. But the significant rise of the birds began about 65 million years ago. A mass extinction - probably caused by an asteroid collision - extinguished most of the larger-bodied dinosaurs, but left a few feathered creatures. The loss of so many other species freed up significant ecological niches, giving these feathered animals a unique chance to diversify.

-- *Birding Community E-bulletin*,

refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin

Camera Trapping Golden Eagle Update

DOAS volunteers are currently operating 11 camera traps in Delaware and Otsego Counties. All the usual suspects have been photographed: Bald and Golden Eagles, Common Ravens, American Crows, 2 kinds of fox, fishers, coyotes, bobcats.

Some sites have large numbers of eagles and ravens thus stressing

the bait supply. We typically use about 100 road kills each year.

Golden Eagle trapping has not started as of this writing. We expect to begin shortly after the arrival of transmitters.

Peg DiBenedetto will be speaking about this season's efforts, and her experiences training with Scott Van Arsdale, at the program on April 17.



Bald Eagle chasing Golden Eagle



How many eagles?



Song Sparrow, by Dave Kiehm

Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) 18th Annual Count

The 2015 GBBC will take place February 13-16

The *Great Backyard Bird Count* is an annual 4-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are.

Everyone is welcome—from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

See birdcount.org for details.

Upcoming Activities

February

February 7 – Golden Eagle Count: As part of our effort to understand the numbers and range of winter resident Golden Eagles we are conducting a one day raptor count covering much of Delaware County. How much of the county we cover depends in large part on the availability of volunteers. The counts should take about 4 hours. They are conducted during the day when birds might be soaring or perch hunting.

We are creating territories/routes with approximately 50-60 miles of road in each. This should allow enough time for slow travel while regularly stopping and scanning. The routes should be started between 9 and 10 AM when birds have become active.

Since we expect to have more territories than skilled people, we need to maximize our highly skilled birders – those who are able to identify distant eagles by silhouette. These team leaders can bring along others or we will team them with other people as spotters. Golden Eagles are the focus but all raptors will be counted.

In case of extreme weather, teams can count the following day.

If you would like to participate in this count, please contact Tom Salo at salothomas@gmail.com or 607-965-8232. If you believe you are skilled enough to lead a team, share information about your experience and skill level. If you have a preferred part of the county you want to survey, we will try to accommodate you. Participants will be sent a territory map, data form and count protocol.

February 13-16: Great Backyard Bird Count, birdcount.org

February 17 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM

February 20 – Hiking the John Muir Trail: Kathy Mario for many years has been an avid hiker, conquering many well known trails throughout the United States. She has also excellent birding skills and recently developed with members of the disbanded Delhi Birding Club a bird brochure for the Upper Delaware Valley. Program will be held at the Elm Park Methodist Church, begins at 7:30 PM and is free and open to the public. Refreshments are

served. For further information; contact Eleanor Moriarty at 607-435-2054.

March

March 17 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM

March 20 – Ravens: Program by Tom Salo.

April

April 4 – Lake Otsego Waterfowl Trip: The annual spring waterfowl trip around Lake Otsego and environs will leave from Cooperstown's Lake Front Docks at the foot of Fair St. at 8 AM sharp. Co-leaders will be Matt Albright, Bob Donnelly and John Davis. Sponsored by the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society for several years, the trip has always attracted many area birders. Cars will be pooled and radio connected, and the trip will last until around noon. For more information, contact John Davis at davi7js4@hughes.net or 607-547-9688

April 17 – Golden Eagle Trapping: Peg DiBenedetto will be speaking about this season's efforts, and her experiences training with Scott Van Arsdale.

April 21 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM

May

May 2 – Plant and Tree ID: Guided activities with Educator and DOAS Summer Program Director, Meghan Gigandet. Pre-registration is required by email to Susan O'Handley, Education Chair at sjohandley@gmail.com. \$4 per child fee/adults are free.

May 19 – DOAS Board Meeting: 7 PM

June

June 6 – Wild Edibles: Guided activities with Educator and DOAS Summer Program Director, Meghan Gigandet. Pre-registration is required by email to Susan O'Handley, Education Chair at sjohandley@gmail.com. \$4 per child fee/adults are free.

June 7 – 3rd Annual Birds, Brunch, Beer: *Save the date!*

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; family memberships \$20 annually or \$30 for two years.

Make 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: _____



DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

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www.doas.us

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December–January Bird Sightings

Just when I was practically sick of winter and really being only one month into it, a lone Ruffed Grouse appeared. It took top billing silhouetted against the snow covered fields, bushes and trees of a patch of Treadwell.

On Dec. 19th taking her favorite shortcut from Oneonta to Delhi via Jackson Hill Road, Pam Peters spotted a Rough-legged Hawk, light morph, perched in a tree with several crows harassing it. On the 20th Becky Gretton scouted out Hyde Bay at Glimmerglass Park and saw Hooded and Common Mergansers, Ring-necked Ducks and a Common Goldeneye. An adult Bald Eagle was perched in a tall tree for a short while and Red-tailed Hawks were also in the area. On the same day while driving toward West Oneonta Sandy Bright and Charlie Scheim saw two majestic Red-tails sitting together in a tree and as they approached Morris they were delighted to get a view of a striking light-morph

Rough-legged Hawk leaving its perch and kiting over a field. On Dec. 22 Becky Gretton observed four Short-eared Owls hunting over the Ripple Corners area, perching, flying and occasionally interacting with each other. The next day a Great Blue Heron was seen by Betsy O'Brien as it flew over her car on her road adjacent to Goodyear Lake and one was also seen by Charlie Scheim standing on a log by the little pond that can be seen from I88 near the Oneonta city trash transfer station. Leaving NBT Bank on Oneida Street in Oneonta on 12/30 Leslie Preston heard screeching coming from over the embankment that leads down to the pond behind the building. Two Bald Eagles were sitting side by side in a tree perhaps exchanging fishing stories.

In January the first full month of winter began. Since Christmas Kathy Mario had been watching a lone White-throated Sparrow learn to feed from her Delhi hanging feeder since it was determined not to just feed from the ground. A bemused Carolina Wren looked on. On



January 8th Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright had been enjoying the hooting back and forth of two Great Horned Owls in the mid-city woods area of their Oneonta home hoping the couple might move into the neighborhood. On the 13th Bob Donnelly spotted four Common Redpolls, the first this season for him, accompanied by hordes of American Goldfinches in Roseboom. For the last month a male Red-bellied Woodpecker has faithfully been feeding on suet cakes, even when the temperature has gone down to zero, in Peter Clark's Cooperstown backyard. The woodpecker has also tried to get seed from a small feeder while valiantly holding on as blustery winds blew it back and forth. Winter is still here for two more months, but that won't hinder the sighting of many glorious birds.

If you have bird sightings to report, contact me at 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