



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

Coming Activities

March

March 17 – Board Meeting

March 20 – Program: Ravens –
Wolf-Birds in New York

April

April 4 – Field Trip: Lake Otsego
Waterfowl Trip

April 17 – Program: DOAS Research
Projects

April 21 – Board Meeting

May

May 2 – Family Program: Plant and
Tree ID

May 9 – Field Trip: Oneonta
Susquehanna Greenway

May 15 – Program: A Photo Journey
to the Galapagos

May 19 – Board Meeting

June

June 6 – Family Program: Wild
Edibles

June 7 – Birds, Brunch, Beer

More information on page 7

When Whip-Poor-Wills Call

Late winter – cabin fever time – is when they start calling in my mind, even though they are still 900 miles south in the open pine forests of the deep South.

When I was a youngster in rural Connecticut, the evening lullabies on late spring nights were sung by whip-poor-wills; and if I woke before dawn they were still going strong, lulling me back to peaceful slumber. A powerful memory, indeed! We moved from Connecticut when I was ten, and in the many decades since I can total on the



Whip-Poor-Will, by Laura Gooch/Flickr Creative Commons

fingers of one hand the totality of my subsequent whip-poor-will experience. Moving to rural Otsego County in 2001, I brought hopes that my spring nights might once again be blessed by those urgent calls. But in recent decades whip-poor-wills, like their nighthawk cousins, have declined steeply in almost all parts of our state, and most other parts of the northeast. After a dozen years of hopeful listening from my back porch outside Morris, I realized that to hear whip-poor-wills again before I died I would have to make a pilgrimage to one of the rare sites in the state where appreciable numbers persist. So two springs ago, when Alice kindly asked what I'd like for my fast-approaching birthday, I was – for once – ready with a reply. “Let’s go to Watertown,” I said.

DOAS regularly exchanges newsletters with Watertown’s North Country Bird Club: our *Kingfisher* for their *Upland Plover*, and I had come across a May/June 2012 issue

(Continued on page 4)

DOAS in the DR

Over the past year, the DOAS Board of Directors has supported an effort spearheaded by Research Committee Chair Peg DiBenedetto to organize an avian survey of an 1,100 acre organic cacao plantation in the Dominican Republic. Owners of the plantation are considering using the property for ecotourism and establishing a preserve to protect birds and the forested landscape of the property.

DOAS promoted the project through this newsletter and our email list, and also contributed \$2500 toward paying experienced Dominican birders to assist with the survey. Our rationale for this was helping in the preservation of an excellent tract of habitat in a country increasingly deforested, and in particular possibly protecting wintering areas for Bicknell's Thrush, a rapidly declining species that breeds on the higher peaks of the Catskills.

On Jan. 10, Peg, Peter Fauth of the Hartwick College Biology Dept., Tod Winston of NYC Audubon, and I departed for the DR. We were joined the next day by Gabriel Willow also of NYC Audubon. After some rental auto misadventures, we reached Plantación de Cacao del Eden, in a rural area near the town of Guanico in the northern part of the



Sunrise birding, by Andy Mason

country. Tamara Moore, one of the plantation owners, met us and led us to a local hotel—also the site of a very loud disco. In fact, the music was still shaking the walls at 2:30 a.m., only 3 hours from when we planned to head out birding!

That morning we

connected with the four Dominican birders who accompanied us for the week. They were excellent in the field, particularly in IDing birds by their chips, which was essential for the numerous migrants that winter there, including Louisiana Waterthrush, Cape May Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Vireo, Indigo Bunting, among many others.

We split into US/DR teams and set out into the jungle-like steep terrain, notating birds as we went and tracking our routes with GPS units. It was very tough going—particularly for me, the oldest member of the group. However, the birds were great, particularly the tropical species, including the dozen species endemic to Hispaniola that were recorded.

We returned to a fine lunch at the finca, after which Tamara gave us a tour of the cacao operation, which involves fermenting and turning the beans for several days in flavored vinegar infusion, then drying prior to bagging and shipping. The plantation is certified as fair trade as well as organic, and great care goes into producing a high-quality product that ends up as tasty specialty chocolate.

Cacao grows as small trees that are scattered throughout the forest, along with some

(Continued on page 4)

THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

AUDUBON SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1968

NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Helen McLean

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Co-Presidents	Andrew Mason Susan O'Handley
Treasurer	Charlie Scheim
Secretary	Rebecca Gretton

Bob Donnelly
Julia Gregory
Rebecca Gretton
Dorian Huneke
Eleanor Moriarty
Stephen Rice
Joe Richardson
Tom Salo
Julie Smith

COMMITTEE CHAIRS* AND

OTHER ASSIGNMENTS

Conservation*:	Andy Mason
Education*:	Susan O'Handley
Field Trips*:	Bob Donnelly
Hawk Watch*:	Andrew Mason Tom Salo
Hospitality*:	Julia Gregory
Membership*:	Andy Mason
Programs*:	Eleanor Moriarty
Publicity*:	Eleanor Moriarty
Research*:	Peg DiBenedetto Tom Salo
Sanctuary*:	Andrew Mason
Bird Counts:	Sandy Bright
Charter Dinner:	Julia Gregory
Finance:	Gray Mason
Historian:	Julie Smith
Sales:	Stephen Rice

ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO:

Delaware Otsego Audubon Society
P.O. Box 544
Oneonta, NY 13820

Email: info@doas.us

ON THE WEB:

www.doas.us

[www.facebook.com/](http://www.facebook.com/DelawareOtsegoAudubonSociety)

DelawareOtsegoAudubonSociety

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

Conservation and Legislation

DEC Releases Draft Bald Eagle Plan—In late February, the NY State Dep't. of Environmental Conservation released a draft conservation plan for Bald Eagles in the state. The agency is seeking public input on this document that will “...*guide DEC staff in the management of bald eagles and inform the public of actions recommended to achieve this goal.*”

Bald Eagle is an important species to all Americans, and particularly to New Yorkers and to us locally. In the plan's excellent overview of past management activities, including the highly successful reintroduction effort in the state, it is clear that NY has been a leader in bringing Bald Eagles back from endangered species status in the lower 48 states. In addition, it documents that the Upper Delaware region has one of the highest concentrations of both breeding and wintering BEs in the state, which we know well from our own observations and research.

The goal of the plan is to ensure the perpetuation of a healthy Bald Eagle population, including its essential habitat and the ecosystems upon which it depends. To achieve this, the plan lays out three objectives and a number of strategies. As always, budget constraints and political considerations will keep some of these objectives and strategies from being implemented. However, having them stated on paper provides some backing when the birds face dangers.

Among the strategies that will most impact eagles in our region are:

- Participate in environmental review of projects potentially impacting eagles or eagle habitat.
- Provide guidance for the siting and ongoing operation of wind turbines, communication towers, and high voltage lines.
- Provide outreach regarding alternatives to lead ammunition for hunting.
- Identify and protect important wintering areas.

Regarding review of projects potentially impacting eagles, the plan relies heavily on convincing developers to avoid activity when birds are most sensitive to disturbance. This includes courtship, egg laying, incubation, and early and late nestling periods. The plan calls for no construction activity within 660 ft. of a nest if a visual barrier exists between the work and the nest, and no such activity within 1/4 mile of a nest without a barrier. It is questionable whether the 660 ft. buffer—slightly more than the length of two football fields—is adequate to protect active nests from major, ongoing construction such as that occurring with the Constitution and other pipelines.

The strategy to “provide guidance” for siting of wind turbines, towers and transmission lines is largely the same as DEC's current approach, which is not applied with consistency, often due to

staffing and budget shortages. A glaring example of this was the proposed Walton wind project, which neither DEC or the US Fish & Wildlife Service recognized as a major threat to resident and wintering Bald Eagles until DOAS brought it directly to their attention.

Our Chapter has been very involved in outreach and public education on the dangers of lead ammunition to Bald Eagles and other wildlife. Although DEC has made some modest efforts, it has not been a priority for them, and the language of this plan promises no change. The agency has not even required its own staff to use non-toxic ammo—a glaring contradiction.

What you can do—Comments on the Bald Eagle plan can be submitted to DEC until April 10. For information and a link to the full plan, visit: www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7068.html

Ask that the document be revised to increase the buffer zones for construction near eagle nests to at least 1/2 mile. Although the birds can become habituated to traffic and other routine human activity, the noise, machinery and landscape changes from heavy construction is a much greater threat to the birds. Also stress that the sections covering environmental review and guidance for wind projects and towers need more teeth. DEC should require such consultation from developers, and follow through with consistent and rigorous reviews of impacts on eagles.

Regarding lead poisoning of birds, the plan should make addressing this issue a priority in DEC, and should set targets for reductions in use of lead ammunition through the period of the plan. The current approach and continuation of the status quo are wholly inadequate to make progress on this long-term environmental contaminant.

~ by Andy Mason



Eagle watchers, by Andy Mason

DOAS in the DR (Continued from page 2)

coffee, avocados, mangos and other fruit. Since it requires shade, overstory vegetation remains, providing good bird habitat. The plantation also serves as the watershed for the town's water supply, so a portion has been set aside as undisturbed, even for cacao.

We returned to a second hotel—quieter, but very rustic, to say the least. We did tough it out for the week, and suffered more car problems, but the DR is a third world nation, and once away from the all-inclusive resorts, this is the way of life.

The rest of the week was spent making similar forays into the corners of the plantation—again, grueling but rewarding. On the last day we gathered to compile a bird list and to flesh out some recommendations and advice for the plantation owners, later turned into a more formal report. We tallied 63 species, but did not find Bicknell's Thrush. It most likely would have been in the remotest part of the property, so still possibly present.



Lizard Cuckoo, by ZankaM via WikiCommons

The consensus of the group was that the land is very good and important bird habitat, but could be improved with some changes to cultivation practices, such as retaining more understory and avoiding disturbance of steep slopes. We did not believe the plantation would be an ecotourism draw based solely on its birdlife. However, in conjunction with many beautiful butterflies and moths, interest in the cacao operation, its lovely setting, and other nearby attractions such as manatees and flamingos, we felt there is potential for low-impact visitation to supplement the current finca activities, allowing the forest to remain largely intact and productive.

So, on balance, the survey met its goals of providing data and information to hopefully help preserve this land, with the added potential benefit of raising interest in other landowners to consider the conservation value of their properties. DOAS was pleased to be part of this effort and hopes to stay involved as the story unfolds.

Andy Mason

When Whip-Poor-Wills Call (Continued from page 1)

of their newsletter listing several intriguing local field trips – including a sunset outing to the nearby Limerick Cedars Preserve “to look and listen for whip-poor-wills, American woodcock and prairie warblers”. An email to Bill Haller, editor of “The Upland Plover”, elicited a quick and generous response, detailing a bounty of recommendations and directions to prime birding areas near Watertown. In fact, wrote Bill, “Our club is planning its 2013 Limerick Cedars visit for the night you propose to arrive. You’ll find us parked along the road that passes through the preserve.”

And so, on May 22, 2013, Alice and I achieved a sunset rendezvous with Bill and his fellow birders, discovering that Limerick was one of several white cedar/scrub barrens in the Watertown area – barrens because the substratum primarily consists of flat expanses of exposed limestone, with stunted woody vegetation largely restricted to cracks in this pavement. As we arrived, a brown thrasher was treating the company to a medley of song from his extensive repertoire; as the dusk deepened, woodcocks began “peenting” from several nearby strutting areas; and as darkness arrived in earnest, there came the lost music of my youth: “Whip-poor-will.....whip-poor-will”. Magic! I was young again!

The next morning Alice and I drove to Red Lake, a locale Bill Haller had strongly recommended for “warblers, vireos, tanagers, gnatcatchers, waterbirds, etc.”; and in a couple of hours we recorded about 30 species, most notably a warbling vireo singing lustily as he helped his mate build a nest. Then we drove a few miles north to the banks of the St. Lawrence, turning west to follow the great river to its source, the waters of Lake Ontario at Cape St. Vincent. From there we turned southeast – back toward Watertown – stopping en route (again on Bill Haller’s recommendation) at the Chaumont Barrens, a drier version of Limerick Cedars. This preserve boasted a fascinating trail system that featured a wealth of colorful and unusual limestone-loving wildflowers – prairie smoke, yellow lady’s slipper, white trillium, blue phlox, prairie dropseed, starry false solomon’s seal.... Oh yes, interesting fauna too: towhees galore, prairie warblers, a black and white warbler, field sparrows, a pure white albino robin – and the biggest, most beautiful milk snake I’d ever seen, basking disdainfully on a limestone slab. This was prime whip-poor-will habitat too, but we were hungry and tired and it would be hours before they would start calling – so we headed back to Watertown for a good dinner and early-to-bed. The next day the weather had turned ugly: rain (turning to sleet!) and a biting wind. We headed home to Otsego County. A great trip. This spring, Alice, let’s go back - something is calling in my mind!

– Joe Richardson

Delaware County Raptor Count

Twelve teams spent over 57 hours surveying a large portion of Delaware County for raptors on February 6 and 7. This effort was one of our initiatives to determine how many Golden Eagles are residing in our local area in the winter. From the perspective of finding Golden Eagles, it was not much of a success. Only 3 were found. The weather was a significant factor. There was poor visibility from snow on Saturday, the day when most teams surveyed their routes. There was also a lack of lift so virtually no birds were in the sky. This is where goldens are most often seen in our area. If we continue this effort next winter, we will find a way to be more flexible about the weather so as to avoid a repeat.

Of particular interest were 2 species that are uncommon in these cold climes, and especially rare during a very cold winter, American Kestrel and Red-shouldered Hawk. There was also a leucistic Red-tailed Hawk found. Leucistic birds lack feather pigment in whole or part but are not true albinos.

Teams covered 995 miles of Delaware County roads counting every predatory bird they found, and also Wild Turkeys – eagle food.

Observer hours totaled 171. Thank you to everyone who helped with the count, including those who helped with planning and map making.

Tom Salo

Count Summary

Golden Eagle	3
Bald Eagle	28
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4
Cooper's Hawk	5
Northern Goshawk	1
Red-shouldered Hawk	1
Red-tailed Hawk	84
American Kestrel	1
Wild Turkey	341
Northern Shrike	1

Golden Eagle Update

Murphy's Law is in effect this winter. We finally received transmitters the week before this writing. Then another blast of sub-zero cold hit. The Golden Eagles are scavenging irregularly, as they are inclined to in extreme cold. We believe they prefer to hunt under these conditions. They return to our sites once the weather starts reaching the freezing point.

Even though goldens have been erratic, the camera traps have been quite active through this brutal weather. Large numbers of Bald Eagles and Common Ravens have been feeding all winter. Fishers, bobcats, coyotes, and hawks are being seen.

Adult birds will start migrating in early March. We do not intend to trap migrants. However, we will be targeting individual birds in March this trapping season. Since we have not made a single trapping attempt as of the third week of February, we hope to have more to report next month.

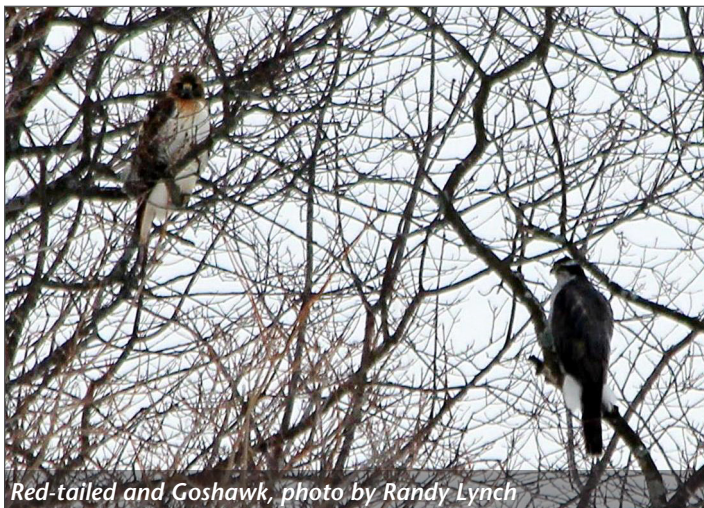
Tom Salo



Camera trap photo



Camera trap photo



Red-tailed and Goshawk, photo by Randy Lynch

Betty and Wilbur Davis State Park: A Nice Place to Go for Spring Migration

After a long stretch of winter weather in February of 2009 the sky cleared, the sun came out and my friend Diane Graf and I decided to finally follow those State Park signs to the *Betty and Wilbur Davis Park* in the Town of Westford. We were surprised to see everything the park has to offer. There is no admission fee. As we hiked along Davis Road on February 24, two really big birds passed overhead, flying in a northerly direction: Golden Eagles! During March visits a Red-shouldered Hawk mixed it up a little with a Red-tail, and Eastern Bluebirds and an Eastern Meadowlark appeared. Ravens provided entertainment. It was a wonderful place to celebrate spring's arrival, and seemed like a great place to hawkwatch.

A Golden Eagle Survey was conducted at the Park from March 7- 13 in 2010 and the Davis Park data began its life on hawkcount.org and continues to be entered as counting occurs. Look for DOAS-Davis State Park on the website.

In March of 2011, a month of scheduled counting occurred. It was a wintery March that year! Park worker Joe Ritton kindly built a wind break that he installs at the start of spring migration. Did I mention that there is a clean, heated, ADA accessible rest room just a short drive away? If you're inclined to spend a few days at the Park, cabins are for rent.

While there's never a guarantee that birds will migrate past the observation site, a few factors may be considered: wind, visibility and cloud cover. Davis Park is perched up high, and wind can be fierce there, so be prepared with many more layers of clothing than you think necessary as you leave home, warm footwear, hand and toe warmers, and something to protect your face. A scope is a great idea. The wind break will improve its stability. Precipitation usually shuts down flight and certainly hinders visibility. Cloud cover causes birds to fly at lower altitudes, whereas a sunny blue sky can send birds up high with lots of thermal lift, making them very hard to see!

Counting will occur on a casual basis this spring, so check hawkcount.org for results. Feel free to visit for some hawkwatching of your own. Bring a portable chair and some nourishment and park at the lot visible on Davis Road Your range of possibilities includes Bald and Golden Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Merlin, Kestrel, Broad-winged Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Northern Harrier and of course, Turkey Vulture. Barred Owls have been heard occasionally. Snow Buntings remained through March last year.

Becky Gretton

It's Time to Clean Bird Houses

It's March, time to maintain and clean bird houses. Bluebird houses should be cleaned by mid-March in our area. Kestrel and duck boxes should be cleaned in early March. Starling nests, old wasp nests, even squirrels can make the larger boxes unattractive to target birds. Smaller boxes will have old and foul nests, and sometimes mice will be in residence.

The Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota says:

Every spring you should check the box inside and out. Clean out any old nesting material and replace the few inches of sawdust with new, check the attachment to the tree or post, the door, and all the wood for rot. Replace any rotted wood. You can do most of this maintenance in the fall after the kestrels are finished using it, but you will still want to do a quick check in the spring.



Bluebirds building nest,
by Dave Kiehm

The Wood Duck Society website says:

It's time to clean out your wood duck nest boxes if you have not already done so. It is also a great time to 'remove' those nest boxes from trees and install them on poles of wood or metal with a "cone guard" to protect the hen from predators. Nesting season in the northern states starts in late March and runs through early June.

I put coarse sawdust in my duck boxes too. Fine sawdust is too dusty.

DOAS will have bluebird boxes for sale at programs and the *Earth Fest* in Milford

Tom Salo



Birding at Davis State Park, by Tom Salo

Upcoming Activities

March

March 17 – DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 PM

March 20 – Ravens – Wolf-Birds in New

York: Common Ravens are the most intelligent North American bird. They have complex social relationships that extend to other species. These “wolf-birds” have undergone the greatest range expansion of any breeding species in New York during the past 30 years. Formerly found only in the Adirondacks, they have spread across the state and now nest as far south as Long Island.

Ravens are common in the spiritual practices of many northern cultures. These complicated and fascinating birds are well represented in myths, legends, folklore, and literature. Presenter Tom Salo will discuss the cultural and natural history of ravens. He will use photos from our camera traps to illustrate some of their interesting behaviors. Program at 7:30 PM.



Ravens, by Dave Kiehm

*What is the difference between a raven and a crow?
Find out on March 20*

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 – DOAS Research Projects: Peg DiBenedetto will be speaking about this season’s efforts, and her experiences training with Scott Van Arsdale.

April 21 – DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 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 9 – Oneonta Susquehanna Greenway: Field trip led by Sandy Bright and Charlie Schiem, starts at 8 AM.

May 15 – A Photo Journey to the Galapagos: The Fielders

May 19 – DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 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: _____



NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT #422
ONEONTA, NY 13820

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

PO Box 544, ONEONTA, NY 13820

www.doas.us

January–February Bird Sightings

As I was driving to a friend's house in mid-January the wind was swirling around the fields blowing up sheets of powdery snow. A little while later a small flock of snow buntings glided off the side of the road as if they were in musical tandem with the blustery snow. This sight makes dealing with winter's frigid cold temperatures so much more bearable.

On 1/19 Kay Crane's friend Jane had six Eastern Bluebirds in her Walton backyard. A couple of days later a Red-breasted Nuthatch visited Kay's suet feeder in Walton. On 1/24 Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright went on an eagle scouting trip around Delhi and Bovina. By the end of the day they saw nine Red-tailed Hawks, a female American Kestrel, two magnificent Bald Eagles sitting in trees near a creek and a group of a dozen or so Common Ravens milling around the cell tower by the Meredith town barn. January 25th was a big birding day. Bob Donnelly had two Pine Siskins and a Common

Redpoll at his Roseboom feeders and the number of Redpolls increased to about twelve by the end of the day. While driving through Portlandville Gerianne Carillo saw a mature Bald Eagle. Pam Peters enjoyed seeing a Barred Owl land on a tree approximately 30 ft. from her Treadwell home. At Ripple Corners Bob Donnelly watched a Short-eared Owl spend some time hunting and he also saw a Northern Shrike actively pursuing American Tree Sparrows with no apparent luck in a kill. On 1/28 Peter Clark of Cooperstown watched a Red-tailed Hawk come flying out of the sky and attack an American Tree Sparrow while it was feeding on some birdseed. The poor sparrow never knew what hit it!

On the first of February Kay Crane spotted a Sharp-shinned Hawk in her Walton backyard. Unfortunately the sighting included the sacrifice of a Dark-eyed Junco. The next day a White-throated Sparrow visited Kay, Bob Donnelly's Common Redpolls had grown to forty plus and Tom Salo had been seeing on most days for a week between 8-10 Bald



Eagles feeding in Burlington. On the 4th Charlie Scheim saw a Bald Eagle fly low along the Susquehanna from the Oneonta Hannaford parking lot. On Feb. 8th Angelika Rashkow noticed a flock of about a dozen Common Redpolls at her Hartwick feeder. This made for a nice change from the variety of her usual visitors. On 2/14 Dorian Huneke watched a Bald Eagle fly downstream in Treadwell knowing soon it would be joined by its partner since their nest is not too far from the village.

The daytime temperatures might only be in the single digits, but the birds don't seem to mind. They are out and about for all of us to enjoy.

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

Photo: Snow Bunting, By Charles J Homler (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons