



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

Coming Activities

February

February 12-15– Great Backyard Bird Count 2016

February 19– Program :Wells Horton, Photographer

March

March 1– DOAS Board Mtg

March 18– Program :Tom Salo, DOAS Golden Eagle Research

April

April 2–Waterfowl Trip

April 9– Earth Festival and Bird Walk

April 15– Program, Dr. Jeffrey Heilveil, SUNY Biology professor

April 19– DOAS Board Mtg

More information on page 7

Hawk Watch Wrap-up

The 2015 season wrapped up on January 3rd at the DOAS Franklin Mt. Hawk Watch. This is the 27th continuous year of counting at this site. Counting began August 25 and included 100 dates of coverage.

It was an off year at the Hawk Watch. Total raptors tallied were 4312—18% below the 13 year average since full-time coverage began. Several species were down 40-50% from this average, including Osprey, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawk. The Red-tailed Hawk count was down 23%, Golden Eagles 21%, and American Kestrels 59%.

The few bright spots were Bald Eagle, up 39% and Peregrine Falcon 23%. The biggest Broad-winged Hawk day was 9/15, with 480 birds. There were four double-digit Golden Eagle days, including 26 on both 10/30 and 11/14. The peak day for Red-tails was 10/30, with 188.

There is not a clear reason for the declines. A warm fall with few strong cold fronts is probably a factor. Western Pennsylvania sites had big numbers of Golden Eagles early on, suggesting the birds passed through NY west of Franklin Mt. And there is evidence that Red-tailed Hawks may be migrating in fewer numbers, remaining north due to warming conditions.

View all data at www.hawkcount.org.

Many thanks to our dedicated team of volunteer counters and spotters who put in nearly 600 hours of coverage: Larry Dake, Fred Fries, Becky Gretton, Steve Hall, Richard Hendricks, Marilyn Leahy. Andy Mason, Pam Peters, Leslie Preston, and Tom Salo. Special recognition to Steve Hall who covered over half of the dates this season.

Andy Mason

DOAS Awarded \$10,000 Grant The American Eagle Foundation recently awarded DOAS a grant of \$10,961 to conduct public outreach to reduce lead poisoning of bald eagles from bullets and shot in New York State. Efforts will focus on educating hunters on eagle-safe alternatives to lead ammunition. We will produce two professional displays for use at gun shows and wildlife events. Print and radio advertisements will be created. A video will be created for on-line viewing. Opinion pieces will be submitted to publications. As part of this effort we will continue to urge NYSDEC and food banks to help remove lead from both the wildlife and human food chain.

President's Message

Environmental Volunteerism

Volunteers are the backbone of many non-profit organizations. They provide guidance and administration, clerical tasks, field work, fundraising support, and more. DOAS is often approached by individuals and groups about opportunities for volunteering. While our needs are relatively small, we recognize that there are many environmentally focused organizations in our operating region, and that even if we don't need assistance at a given moment, there are likely others who would appreciate the additional support and assistance.



Our 2016 Internship Project will be focused on working towards addressing environmental volunteerism in our region to assist matching volunteers with organizations in our region that are looking for help. Lajoie Bradley, a senior at Hartwick College, will be working with DOAS this spring on the first stages of this project. Lajoie is expected to graduate in May with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology and Environmental Studies. We are thrilled to have her help with this project this semester!



Lajoie Bradley

As part of the first steps of the project, Lajoie will be working to develop an overall plan and an approximate timeline for the project as well as to set up a basic infrastructure for gathering information for both sides of this equation - volunteers and organizations - to determine what information will need to be collected from each audience segment. Once that is completed, we can begin to research some of the specific volunteer needs within the environmental community for promotion through this project.

Our goal is to set up the infrastructure and the starting information to begin connecting organizations and volunteers with each other by this April and we hope it will be a program that can continue to grow and develop thereafter. We are excited to see how this will develop from concept to implementation. Please keep an eye out for progress reports as we go. Our target launch is at the Earth Festival event in Milford, to be held this year on Saturday, April 9 at Milford Central School Gymnasium from 11am-3pm.

If you are interested in volunteer opportunities or if you represent an environmental organization in our region that would like to promote your volunteer needs, please email me at sjohandley@gmail.com so that we can put you on our list and connect with you as we begin to develop the framework for this program.

Susan O'Handley

**THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO
AUDUBON SOCIETY**
FOUNDED 1968

NEWSLETTER EDITOR:
Janet Potter

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

Conservation and Legislation

Positive news in state budget—The reviews of Governor Cuomo's funding proposals were generally good from the environmental community following his State of the State address in January. Primary was the Governor's proposal to put \$300 million into the state's Environmental Protection Fund, the main source of revenue for land acquisition and protection programs, recycling efforts, invasive species protection and waterfront revitalization, among others. This funding level is the highest ever for the EPF and follows years of raids on the funds to balance the overall state budget. As recently as 2013, the EPF was at \$134 million.

The Governor's proposals also include plans to install solar panels on over 150,000 homes and businesses and



eliminate the use of coal in New York State by 2020.

Another positive step is putting the state's climate pollution goals into law.

Of course, all of these worthy efforts will require the state legislature's agreement, which is far from certain. This is where we come in. It is critical that citizens let their state senators and assembly members know that environmental programs are important to them, and that they will be expecting their representatives to support these measures.

What you can do—Call, write or email your state senator and assembly member and tell them you

support increased funding for the EPF, and that the state should continue and accelerate its programs to reduce greenhouse gases. The switch from fossil fuels to wind and solar and other green power sources is well underway, and New York should be a leader in this effort.

The legislature has a self-protective system that allows legislators to avoid taking responsibility and avoiding votes, so be insistent that you expect a firm commitment to support and vote for the environment.

Update on Constitution Pipeline—The company proposing to build the Constitution Pipeline through our region, destroying important bird habitat among other environmental damage, has asked the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for permission to begin cutting down trees along the pipeline route in January. This request comes even though they have not received all the necessary permits for construction. Earthjustice, the law firm representing DOAS and several other environmental organizations has requested a stay of this approval from FERC. We were joined by several other parties, including Stop the Pipeline, and NY Attorney General Eric Schneiderman. This cutting would bring permanent impacts, even if the project eventually fails.

If and when Constitution does receive its necessary permits, Earthjustice will go to court to seek to halt construction until our request for a rehearing of the entire project is accepted or denied. This request has been pending with FERC for nearly a year.

Andy Mason

Environmental Education Grants

Each year, Environmental Education Grants are awarded to classroom teachers in the DOAS area (Delaware, Otsego, eastern Chenango, and western Schoharie Counties) through the DOAS EE Grant Program. 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. Teachers may receive one grant per school year. Grants are competitive

DOAS accepts donations to specifically support the DOAS EE Grant Fund. If you would like to make a contribution, please send check to DOAS, PO Box 541, Oneonta, NY 13820 with EEGrantDonation in the memo of your check. For additional information, please contact Education Committee Chair, Susan O'Handley at 607-643-5680 or at sjohandley@gmail.com

and will be evaluated by a committee of the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society. Previous grants have funded projects such as an environmental field day; construction of a weather station; backyard birds and animal habitats study kits; and pond studies. The deadline for submission for a 2016 DOAS EE Grant is Friday, March 18, 2016. For Grant Guidelines and Application contact Susan O'Handley at 607-643-5680 or at sjohandley@gmail.com



February 19th DOAS Program Wells Horton, Landscape Photographer

Wells Horton is a Central New York landscape photographer. At Age 13, Wells said when he retired he would pursue landscape photography. Having lived in various areas within the State, he has spent the past thirty plus years in the Sherburne area. New York State offers so many photographic opportunities from Orient and Montauk Points to the Catskills, Adirondacks, Hudson Valley, Finger Lake, and Central and Western New York. Mixing color, light, and weather, Wells captures the State's landscapes that have a feel of water colors. Wells conducts various photography workshops. His photographic work can be seen at <http://wells-horton.smugmug.com>.

The program will take place on February 19th at 7:30PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut St., Oneonta, NY. DOAS Programs are free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

Mark your calendars for an exciting program on March 18, when DOAS Research Committee Co-Chair Tom Salo will discuss our research efforts on Golden Eagles over the past 2 winters, illustrated with photos and videos!

GMOs--Good or Bad?

by DOAS Board member Tom Salo

I am a bit fussy about what I eat. I have been known to rail against genetically modified food crops. I have even complained because I cannot get venison that hasn't fed on GMO (genetically modified organism) corn in nearby farm fields.

The companies that produce transgenic organisms present their efforts as being good for mankind, helping to feed a hungry world. They create plants to grow in marginal soils. They add missing nutrients to help feed the undernourished. However, the GMO crops we see do not serve the greater good. The most common GMO crops are the ever increasing number of species in the "Roundup Ready" family: soybeans, corn, alfalfa, cotton etc. These crops encourage the use of large amounts of the herbicide glyphosate, which has been linked to cancer and other health problems. These crops are the biggest threat to migratory monarch butterflies to be found within the United States because they kill milkweed, thus destroying the butterfly's habitat.

The GMO industry is also pursuing the growing of trees for fiber or wood. Such trees will not create forests. They will turn habitat into plantations that will lack any ecological diversity.



Given my feelings about transgenic organisms, it may be surprising that there is one GMO effort I support wholeheartedly: the restoration of the American chestnut. The American chestnut was a dominant forest tree throughout the eastern U.S, and probably the most important tree species in much of its range. Some have estimated

that it comprised 25% of the timber volume in the Appalachians. It provided large annual crops of mast for wildlife, livestock and people. It provided high quality, rot-resistant hardwood lumber. It was a staple food of Native Americans. There is even evidence that they intentionally planted, or created stands of this species near villages.

The trees died by the millions after chestnut blight was accidentally introduced to North America at the beginning of the 20th century.

There are two different efforts to create a blight resistant tree for chestnut restoration. One involves hybridizing American chestnut with Chinese chestnut. Multiple backcrosses with pure American trees may create a mostly American hybrid with timber qualities that has resistance to the fungus.

The other effort is transgenic. A resistant tree that is

"Tom Salo on GMOs" Continues on page 7

Christmas Bird Count 2015

December 19th, the day of the Oneonta Christmas Bird Count, dawned cold and windy. The wind, gusting 25 mph or more by afternoon, was a subduing factor in our bird sightings. Despite the overall low numbers of birds (3,693 birds compared to 5,677 last year), we found nearly as many species (49 this year, 50 last), and set some records. 37 Common Ravens were found, tying the previous

record set in 2007. Two species never before seen during our CBC were found (Greater Scaup and Common Goldeneye). The twelve Bald Eagles seen this year blasted the old record of four in 2013. Now there's a species that has made a spectacular comeback! Complete results below.

Sandy Bright

2015 CBC Summary - 1969-2015 - 47 Years, 109

| 2015 # years High # birds (yr.) | | | 2015 # years High # birds (yr.) | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| Snow Goose | 3 | 1169 (11) | Merlin | 1 | 1 (00) | | |
| Common Loon | 2 | 1 (73, 79) | Ring-necked Pheasant | 18 | 3 (71, 84, 86, 00) | | |
| Double-crested Corm. | 1 | 1 (06) | Ruffed Grouse | 35 | 24 (82) | | |
| Tundra Swan | 1 | 1 (99) | American Coot | 1 | 1 (09) | | |
| Great Blue Heron | 1 | 22 | 4 (91) | Wild Turkey | 12 | 35 | 1225 (95) |
| Canada Goose | 400 | 28 | 2681 (11) | Northern Bobwhite | 2 | 5 (75) | |
| Green-winged Teal | 5 | 4 (13) | Killdeer | 2 | 1 (79, 85) | | |
| Am Black Duck | 4 | 30 | 44 (95) | gull sp. | 1 | | |
| Mallard | 58 | 37 | 292 (14) | Ring-billed Gull | 24 | 206 (01) | |
| Mallard/Black Duck Hybrid | 1 | 1 (14) | Herring Gull | 4 | 9 (92) | | |
| Canvasback | 2 | 13 (01) | Rock Pigeon | 342 | 40 | 1517 (98) | |
| Ring-necked Duck | 1 | 12 (99) | Mourning Dove | 70 | 45 | 409 (98) | |
| Bufflehead | 3 | 3 (88) | Common Barn-Owl | 1 | 1 (71) | | |
| Greater Scaup | 1 | 1 | 1 (15) | Eastern Screech-Owl | 5 | 16 | 11 (12) |
| Common Goldeneye | 1 | 1 | 1 (15) | Long-eared Owl | 2 | 2 | 1 (12) |
| Common Merganser | 31 | 26 | 100 (12) | Great Horned Owl | 2 | 34 | 5 (04, 07, 12) |
| Hooded Merganser | 2 | 7 | 97 (12) | Barred Owl | 1 | 34 | 3 (12) |
| Osprey | 2 | 1 | 1 (93, 00) | N. Saw-whet Owl | 5 | 2 | 2 (04, 07) |
| Golden Eagle | 1 | 4 | 2 (04) | Short-eared Owl | 1 | 1 | 1 (08) |
| Bald Eagle | 12 | 11 | 12 (15) | Belted Kingfisher | 3 | 29 | 5 (99) |
| Northern Harrier | 9 | 1 | 1 (73, 80, 83, 94, 98, 00, 07, 09, 10) | Red-headed Woodpecker | 3 | 1 | 1 (80, 82, 99) |
| Sharp-Shinned Hawk | 21 | 2 | 2 (81, 90, 98, 05, 08, 0) | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 2 | 12 | 12 (14) |
| Cooper's Hawk | 2 | 21 | 5 (09) | Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | 2 | 7 | 3 (93, 97) |
| Goshawk | 14 | 2 | 2 (87) | Downy Woodpecker | 36 | 47 | 85 (08) |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 17 | 47 | 46 (09) | Hairy Woodpecker | 13 | 47 | 59 (71) |
| Rough-legged Hawk | 37 | 10 | 10 (74) | Northern Flicker | 12 | | (69, 00, 03, 05, 06, 09) |
| Kestrel | 1 | 34 | 10 (73) | Pileated Woodpecker | 29 | 9 | 9 (08) |
| | | | | Horned Lark | 6 | 25 | 25 (72) |

| | 2015 | # years | High # birds (yr.) | | 2015 | # years | High # birds (yr.) |
|-------------------------|------|---------|--------------------|------------------------|-------------|---------|--------------------|
| Blue Jay | 217 | 47 | 500 (72) | American Tree Sparrow | 41 | 47 | 269 (71) |
| American Crow | 652 | 47 | 1040 (08) | Chipping Sparrow | | 2 | 8 (83) |
| Common Raven | 37 | 12 | 37 (07, 15) | Field Sparrow | | 1 | 2 (77) |
| Black-capped Chickadee | 414 | 47 | 799 (07) | Savannah Sparrow | | 1 | 1 (71) |
| Boreal Chickadee | | 1 | 3 (75) | Fox Sparrow | | 1 | 1 (97) |
| Tufted Titmouse | 42 | 39 | 93 (09) | Song Sparrow | 2 | 34 | 41 (75) |
| Red-breasted Nuthatch | 6 | 47 | 40 (93) | Swamp Sparrow | | 1 | 6 (75) |
| White-breasted Nuthatch | 41 | 47 | 91 (07) | White-throated Sparrow | | 28 | 39 (72) |
| Brown Creeper | 1 | 36 | 9 (99) | White-crowned Sparrow | | 6 | 3 (69) |
| Winter Wren | | 1 | 1 (12) | Dark-eyed Junco | 216 | 47 | 1051 (71) |
| Carolina Wren | 1 | 19 | 4 (06) | Snow Bunting | | 20 | 500 (76) |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet | 1 | 29 | 20 (82) | Red-winged Blackbird | | 14 | 150 (11) |
| Ruby-crowned Kinglet | | 2 | 4 (99) | Rusty Blackbird | 1 | 2 | 2 (74, 15) |
| Eastern Bluebird | | 6 | 35 (07) | Common Grackle | | 9 | 65 (71) |
| Swainson's Thrush | | 1 | 1 (71) | Brown-headed Cowbird | 30 | 24 | 200 (84) |
| Hermit Thrush | | 1 | 1 (07) | Bullock's Oriole | | 1 | 1 (70) |
| Wood Thrush | | 1 | 1 (71) | Baltimore Oriole | | 1 | 1 (11) |
| Varied Thrush | | 2 | 1 (71, 83) | Pine Grosbeak | | 15 | 80 (72) |
| American Robin | | 19 | 16 (07) | Purple Finch | 9 | 39 | 102 (82) |
| Gray Catbird | | 2 | 1 (72, 07) | House Finch | 40 | 40 | 452 (86) |
| Northern Mockingbird | | 8 | 2 (81) | Red Crossbill | | 5 | 20 (86) |
| Cedar Waxwing | 1 | 28 | 42 (07) | White-winged Crossbill | | 2 | 3 (85) |
| Northern Shrike | | 22 | 5 (95) | Common Redpoll | | 26 | 101 (99) |
| European Starling | 705 | 46 | 2471 (00) | Pine Siskin | 2 | 26 | 149 (08) |
| Yellow-rumped Warbler | | 1 | 1 (75) | Am. Goldfinch | 108 | 47 | 418 (08) |
| Northern Cardinal | 23 | 46 | 76 (76) | Evening Grosbeak | | 32 | 696 (86) |
| Rose-breasted Grosbeak | | 1 | 6 (79) | House Sparrow | 81 | 47 | 947 (74) |
| Eastern Towhee | | 3 | 2 (80) | Total Birds | 3693 | | |
| Sparrow sp. | | | | | | | |

December-January Bird Sightings continued from page 8



*Snow Geese- photo By
Manjith Kainickara
(Wikimedia Photo)*

and 75) and Randy Lynch (about 100) in Stamford. Sometimes lighting makes the sight of these beautiful birds an almost magical experience. Warren Ryther, spotting a flock in Garrettsville, reported: "Contrasted against a dark cloud, it looked as though fairy dust were being strewn across the sky."

In late December to early January, a variety of smaller birds were reported. Pine Siskins were seen by Bob Donnelly (Cherry Valley), Kay Crane (Walton), and Andy Mason (Jefferson), who also reported about 20 Snow Buntings there. Leslie Preston found Coots, Mallards, Hooded and Common Mergansers, and Buffleheads on Otsego Lake. After a group outing near Delhi, Pam Peters reported Wood Duck and American Black Duck. Rod Spangle discovered 2 adult male Pine Grosbeaks "gritting" at the side of the road in Unadilla, an excellent and unusual sighting for this locale and season!

Sandy Bright

Upcoming Activities

February

February 12 - 15—Great Backyard Bird Count 2016:

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at birdcount.org.

February 19— DOAS Public Program: Wells Horton will present photos of landscapes and wildlife from New York State. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

March

March 1— DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 PM

March 18— DOAS Public Program: On March 18, DOAS Research Committee Co-Chair Tom Salo will discuss our research efforts on Golden Eagles over the past two winters, illustrated by numerous photos and videos including information about camera trapping, tracking of the eagles, data gathering on known roost locations, and the results of winter raptor counts. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. .

April

April 2—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 8AM sharp. Co-leaders will be Matt Albright, Bob Donnelly and John Davis. 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 9—Earth Festival and Morning Bird Walk:

Bird Walk, meet in the Milford Central School parking lot to car pool, time to be determined. Contact Bob Donnelly for more information at rsdonn@yahoo.com or 264-8156. Earth Festival, at the school, 11am-3pm - Vist the DOAS table!

April 15— DOAS Public Program: Dr. Jeffrey Heilveil.

Dr. Heilveil is a Biology professor at SUNY Oneonta who will present a program related to his areas of study: aquatic ecology and entomology. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

April 19— DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 PM

For more information contact Susan O'Handley at (607) 643-5680 or email sjohandley@gmail.com

"Tom Salo on GMOs" Continued from page 4

99.999% pure American is already in the approval process. Since only one gene was necessary to induce blight resistance, the transgenic trees are much more pure than the back-crossed hybrids. The best hybrid back-crosses are 94% American.

Hybrids also contain a variety of Chinese genes in the remaining 6%. They can be expressed in various ways in future offspring. These Chinese genes would create genetic pollution if released into forests of American chestnut.

Genetic engineering, like other technologies, is not good or bad. It is all about how it is used. It allows the multinational agriculture companies to monopolize the

seed market with patented GMO seeds while increasing sales of dangerous chemicals. Meanwhile, the same technology may save a native species from being functionally extinct. Ecological restoration is certainly among the best and highest uses of this technology. Someday we may find we need this technology to save a number of other species. We could lose hemlock from woolly adelgids, as has already happened south of us. Ash is on the verge of a catastrophe across its range.

While I will continue to choose organic products much of the time, I do look forward to someday eating a transgenic American chestnut.



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December-January Bird Sightings

Warmer weather kept some birds around longer than usual. Kingfishers were still hunting the Mill Race (Oneonta) and Utsayantha Lake (Andy Mason). A Brown Thrasher, present at the Hawk Watch throughout December, was still there when Andy closed it up in early January. He also saw a single Robin in Jefferson. Becky Gretton reported a singing Carolina Wren in Oneonta. Kay Crane observed 2 male Cowbirds (Walton) A Song Sparrow visited Linda Pearce's yard (Goodyear Lake). Pam Peters reported a Great Blue Heron and 2 Barn Swallows near Delhi.

Leslie Preston and Bonnie Seegmiller were seeing more woodpeckers than desired, as those insect-foragers were drilling into their respective houses. Most sightings were much more welcome, including the Red-bellied Woodpecker that was keeping Blue Jays and Chickadees at bay at the suet in Peter and Vivien Clark's yard in

If you have bird sightings to report, contact Sandy Bright, brights@hartwick.edu, at 40 Fair St., Oneonta, NY 13820, or at 607 287-4465 for the next issue of The Belted Kingfisher.

Cooperstown.

Many reports have involved raptors. Dorian Huneke observed a pair of Red-tailed Hawks in Treadwell, and a different pair the next day: one large, white, and probably leucistic. Red-tails were also seen by Pam Peters near Treadwell, Leslie Preston at Franklin Mtn., and another nearly all-white hawk near Harpersfield by Randy Lynch. Tom Salo reported Cooper's Hawk raiding his feeders, along with some riled-up crows and a juvenile Goshawk in Burlington. It was also crows that alerted Charlie and me to a Goshawk in Oneonta.

Eagle sightings have become more common. Ravens harassed Goldens over Tom Salo's yard (Burlington) and near Harpersfield (Randy Lynch); another soared near Bloomville (Dorian Huneke). Bald Eagles reported were: 1 perched close to a Red-tail in Oneonta (Charlie Scheim); 1 at Franklin Mtn. (Leslie Preston); 3 near Delhi (Dorian); 3 near Margaretville (Pam Peters); one plus 5 noisy ravens near Cherry Valley (Cindy Campbell); one amidst a group of crows in Cooperstown (Leslie); 1 near Treadwell (Pam); and 1 near Fly Creek (Chris Kjolhede).

Snow Geese were on the move in early January. Flocks were seen by Pam Peters near Treadwell, Becky Gretton in Springfield (2 groups of about 200 **Continued on page 6**