



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

COMING ACTIVITIES

February

February 16– DOAS Program, Photographer Rod Sutton, “Reptiles and Amphibians and Their Roles in Our Ecosystem”

February 16– 19 Great Backyard Bird Count

March

March 6–DOAS Board Mtg.

March 16– DOAS Program, “Climate Change in New York”

April

April 17–DOAS Board Mtg.

April 20– DOAS Program, Photographer Kyle Dudgeon “Life at Sea Level”

April 21–DOAS Earth Festival Bird Walk

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**DOAS PROGRAMS
ARE FREE & OPEN TO
THE PUBLIC**

When to Flee—Assessing Threats and Risk

By DOAS Director Tom Salo

Sisu got me thinking about behavior. She is one of our tracked Golden Eagles. She keeps returning to the same spot where she has been caught and handled twice. Apparently, she decided a good source of food is worth the risk.

Some animals are spooked easily. The word “flighty” comes to mind. There is an energy cost to being flighty. Unnecessarily fleeing wastes energy. Staying too long may also be costly, very costly.

There is a concept known as Flight Zone. It is the area around an animal which cannot be entered by a predator, or human, without causing alarm and flight. A similar concept is Flight Initiation Distance (FID). This describes how close a predator can get before flight takes place.



“Sisu” Golden Eagle Photo
By Peg DiBenedetto

Some species are more flighty than others. The same is true of individuals within a species. Beyond these tendencies, there are many factors that affect

FID. The behavior of the threat is one.

You can get very close to a rabbit if you don’t look at it. Song birds will visit my feeder while a Sharp-shinned or Cooper’s Hawk feeds very close by, sometimes under the feeder. A hunting hawk is a threat. A feeding hawk is not.

Studies have found the FID of American Robins varies according to whether people are following established paths, and if they are looking at the birds. FID is shortest when people are on paths and not looking at the birds. They are greatest

“Flee” Continued to page 5



The 21st annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), will be held February 16 through February 19, 2018. This 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. Each checklist helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share.

Co-President's Column

by Susan O'Handley

In the Summer of 1990, I went on a canoe trip that would change my life. I was four years out of college and had yet to find any meaningful career path, having spent time in office management and then working my way up in a national retail chain. I realized that I had no passion for any of it and my youth and impetuous nature allowed me the freedom to quit my job and do some soul-searching. I spent three heavenly months without any commitments other than a self-imposed daily 3-mile walk on the beautiful beaches of Westhampton.

I had been introduced to birding a few years earlier by a close friend who always knew where she wanted her career to go - ornithology and education were her passions. I learned quickly and enjoyed these excursions so much that I began to birdwatch on my own. Although I always had an affinity for the natural world (I grew up in the Pine Barrens of Long Island and had miles and miles of pristine landscapes that I explored on a regular basis), I never had an inkling there were careers that would allow you to share a deeper understanding of how natural systems worked and thrived if you had the foresight to protect them.

Back to that fateful canoe trip.... It was mid-June, and I received a call from my birding buddy that she needed to lead a canoe trip on the Peconic on behalf of an organization that had planned the trip but whose trip leader had to cancel at the last minute. She was bringing a co-worker with her but wanted extra eyes out to help spot birds.



Susan with birding buddy Mary Richard in the Adirondacks mid 1990's

In the midst of the trip - which was thoroughly enjoyable - my friend and her co-worker started talking about a staffing issue at the environmental camp program where they were working and how I might be a good fit for the job. With a camp position, I didn't need to be an expert, but I did need to have enthusiasm for the subject matter (I met those qualifications). A few days later, I was officially hired.

Those few weeks over that summer put me on a path that would lead to a 20+ year career in Environmental Education and Program Administration where I would work with student groups, educators, and public audiences for organizations that were doing great environmental education and conservation work. The work had meaning for me, and though the pay made life difficult, I found there was a great deal of value and intrinsic personal reward in doing work that you believed had a positive impact.

I'm not sure when things changed for me - I think it was somewhere around the gloom and doom time of 'Peak Oil' and when dystopian books like *The Road* were popular. It was around this time that New York State started closing their environmental

"Susan's Column" Continued to page 4

THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

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Janet Potter

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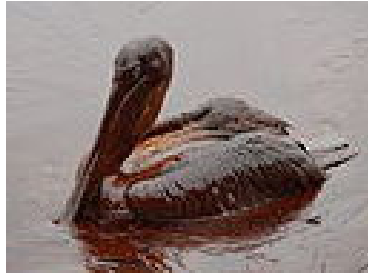
To contribute notes or articles for
The Belted Kingfisher, email:
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Conservation and Legislation

The assault continues—The administration in Washington has not slowed down its anti-environmental attacks; in fact, if anything, it is accelerating them. In recent weeks, President Trump has:

- Removed mention of the words “climate change” from government websites—notably the Environmental Protection Agency.
 - Reversed Obama-era policy by decreeing that the accidental killing of birds—from eagles colliding with wind turbines to waterfowl oiled in waste lagoons—is no longer a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
 - Removed protected status from important western lands that had been designated as National Monuments. The Bears Ears National Monument was cut by 85% and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by half.
 - Opened up the U.S. coastline to oil and gas drilling (later exempting Florida), an action opposed by nearly all affected states.
 - With the help of Congress, has also opened up the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration and production.
- This is hardly a complete list—and it follows earlier actions such as pulling the nation out of the Paris Climate Accord, OKing the Keystone XL Pipeline, and dropping rules on hydrofracking and methane leaks.

What you can do—Unfortunately there is not much we can do about these administrative actions. Although some



Oiled Pelican
Alaska--USFWS

do require public input, Environmental Protection Agency and Interior Department leadership, as well as President Trump, give much more weight to the opinions of industry than to concerned citizens. We can continue to let our federal officials, particularly Representatives Faso and Tenney, know that we oppose these attacks and ask for Congress to override them via

legislation.

Good news locally—Here in New York, the news is better. In January, a federal court upheld the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's decision to deny the Constitution Pipeline company a Clean Water Act permit it needs to proceed with construction. This is the second rejection of Constitution's efforts to make an end run on DEC's determination.

DOAS has been involved in legal efforts to halt the pipeline and our law firm, Earthjustice's lawyer Moneen Naismith said following this latest setback, “The future of the Constitution pipeline is looking awfully dim.”

This has been a long, hard battle, with many groups and activists committed to protecting our land, air and water from this unnecessary project. It's not over yet, but the momentum is moving in the right direction.

(Contact information for elected officials is available on the conservation page of the DOAS web site, www.doas.us.)

by Andy Mason

Environmental Education Grants are awarded each year to classroom teachers, and home school or student service programs in the DOAS area. These grants enable educators in our region to add new environmental-focused activities to their curriculum or to continue existing initiatives. Grants are competitive 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 receipt of submission for a 2018 DOAS EE Grant is Saturday, March 3, 2018. Educators

can download the Grant Guidelines and Application at <http://doas.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/EE-Grant-Guidelines-and-Application-Cover-Form.pdf>. 2018 DOAS Environmental Education Grants are sponsored in part by Rod Spangle Antique Clock Repair, Unadilla, NY.

DOAS Environmental Education Grants are provided through a special fund. Donations to this fund are accepted at any time through the year. To donate to the DOAS EE Grant Fund, please send check to DOAS, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820 with “EEGrantDonation” in the memo of your check. For additional information, please contact Susan O'Handley at 607-643-5680 or at sjohandley@gmail.com.

“Susan’s Column” Continued from page 2

education centers and my gut thought was ‘They don’t want an informed constituency.’ I have become jaded to believing that protecting the environment will only happen when it costs more to NOT protect it. If you have seen the movie ‘How to Let Go of the World and Love All the Things that Climate Can’t Change’, I was a perfect mirror of Josh Fox in the beginning of that movie: None of it matters. It’s too late. You can’t really make any difference. These are not messages you can share with children when you teach about the environment, so I came to the difficult decision to leave the profession.

BUT...this is our world. Giving up cannot be an option. As Josh Fox went on to point out in his movie, there is still work to be done and we have to keep trying and continue to work towards solutions, and more importantly to be part of that solution. I joined the DOAS Board in 2012 and am inspired by our organization’s ethic to be directly involved in working for environmental protections. Board members take on an issue and unrelentingly pursue it from every angle to be as effective as possible. Our world needs more leaders like this.

Now more than ever before, there is a need to grow an informed constituency. This comes from teaching our children and youth about how ecological systems function so that they can understand how our human activities impact those systems. It comes from getting children outdoors and exposing them on a regular and ongoing basis to the natural world so that they have the ability to develop a ‘sense of place’ as well as a deeper understanding of themselves and the role that they play within and as part of these systems.

Over my years in the profession, I have learned that Environmental Education in schools is always the first



Canoe trip with Mary Richard, Susan O’Handley, Jeff O’Handley

thing to be cut from budgets, with rarely the outcry that comes from cutting arts or sports programs. I have never quite understood this (except to reinforce my belief that ‘they don’t want an informed constituency’) but have accepted it as a truth.

Funding for environmental education programs are critical to our future,

because we really do **want and need an informed constituency** - especially now that the environment is being attacked so vehemently through legislative rollbacks, budget cuts, lack of access to scientific studies and data, and putting ‘foxes in charge of the henhouse.’ Our DOAS Environmental Education Grant Program (details on page 3) needs to significantly grow in order to provide important opportunities for building those connections of our youth to the outdoors. We currently grant \$900 per year to educators in our region who seek support so that they can dedicate time and creativity towards environmental programming for their students. Our \$900 per year fund does not go far in making any kind of consequential impact. I would like to send a plea out to our members, friends and area businesses to consider making a gift to help grow this dedicated fund so that we can achieve a more meaningful impact throughout our region.

I also extend an invitation to those who agree that Environmental Education is important to reach out to me and serve on a committee to explore strategic avenues and take on tasks to support the work of our local educators in this arena.

Oh - and that canoe trip changed my life in one other way. My friend’s coworker? I married him about 3 years later! You just never know what will change someone’s life forever. Thank you in advance for your support.

Mark Your Calendar for Friday, March 16th, “Climate Change in New York: What could happen and how we can avoid the worst of it.” Dr. Kevin Schultz, Associate Professor of Physics at Hartwick College, will explain how scientists believe the climate will change for New York State over the next century and how those changes will affect the environment and our society. While predictions for unmitigated climate change are dire, there is still time for us to avoid the worst of it. Kevin will discuss personal and community strategies to reduce humanity’s carbon footprint. The program begins at 7:30pm at the Elm Park United Methodist Church in Oneonta, NY.



**Climate-threatened
Baltimore Oriole**
By Patty McGann
Flickr Creative Commons

“Flee” Continued from page 1

both off paths and watching the birds.

Distance to a safe place matters. Consider squirrels. They run full speed out in the open but then relax next to a tree.

Some animals become tame, or habituated to humans. We’ve all seen this with park ducks. When baiting my camera trap, some Bald Eagles will sit in trees 50 yards away as I unload the truck.

Body size is another factor. Small birds are often less timid than their larger brethren. Small birds can move very quickly. Large birds cannot take off rapidly, so delaying flight can be more dangerous.

For species hunted by people, behavior changes around hunting seasons.

Other factors affecting the FID of birds include flock size, flock composition – mixed flocks being more tolerant than single species flocks, the habitat or cover present, wind speed and noise.

A bird’s age is also important. Young birds are less cautious. Birds that manage to live to be old may by nature be more

when people are

wary of threats. Sisu was a young bird when she was caught. She is also a unique individual. Some Bald Eagles watch us unload the truck. Others fly away, maybe to return, maybe not.

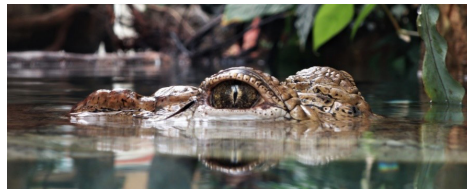
According to a USDA paper, the FID range for different but similar species can vary significantly. This is true of our two species of eagles. Bald Eagles may be much more, or much less flighty than goldens. Bald Eagles may allow you as close as 50 meters, but they may also flee when up to 884 meters distant. That’s over a half mile. The range for Golden Eagles is 105 to 390 meters.

When you are out watching wildlife, pay particular attention to how you affect it. Look for signs of stress or agitation. Watch how animals behave when you look at them. Try watching them peripherally. Do they behave differently if you stop, as opposed to maintaining your pace? Staying in a car is a good because vehicles are often not perceived as threats. Because you care about wildlife, do your best to minimize their stress, especially during breeding season and winter.

Tom Salo

February Program: “Reptiles and Amphibians and Their Roles in Our Ecosystem”

Photographer, educator and DOAS Board Member, Rod Sutton will present photographs and fascinating facts on Reptiles and Amphibians at the Delaware Otsego Audubon Society’s Public Meeting on Friday, February 16, 2018 at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church in Oneonta, NY.



All animals serve a purpose for the natural environment. Reptiles and amphibians are often not appreciated for their contributions to a balanced environment and eco-system. For example, frogs and salamanders thriving in a pond are indicators of a healthy environment. Their thin skin helps them drink and breathe, but also makes them susceptible to environmental pollutants. Snakes are much maligned, and are often killed on sight. Their long legless shape often startles people; however, they play an important role in the natural environment and food webs.

Effective hunters and ambush predators, snakes use their highly developed senses of sight, taste, hearing and touch to locate, recognize and track their prey. Some snakes use powerful constriction to subdue their prey, while others inject venom, a highly modified saliva. Alligators and crocodiles were roaming the planet with dinosaurs. Their appearance

today is little changed from that of the Jurassic period.

Rod Sutton enjoyed nature at an early age, dreaming of becoming a wildlife biologist with a focus on herpetology. One of his

first jobs was at Rogers Environmental Conservation Center in Sherburne, NY.

His life found its own path, leading to a career in advertising, commercial, and industrial photography. With 20 years of experience in the field, he accepted a position with DCMO BOCES in 1993 to start a new academic program in Visual Communications. After 10 years in the classroom, he moved to a position as Coordinator of Instructional Technology, retiring in 2012.

Blending his abilities as photographer and teacher with his appreciation for nature and wildlife, he now dedicates his time to studying and photographing animals in their natural habitats. He also teaches photography workshops and presents programs such as the one we will enjoy on February 16.

This program will look at the diversity of some of the various species through photographs taken over several decades.

“Bird Sightings” Continued from page 8 had an occasional Red-bellied Woodpecker. A Chipping Sparrow frequented Gerianne Carillo’s feeder (Milford). Pam Peters discovered a Turkey Vulture near Franklin. She also found many Black Ducks, Mallards, and Canada Geese along with an immature Bald Eagle and Red-tailed Hawks in Delancey. The last day of 2017 never got above zero in West Burlington, where Jo Salo flushed a Great-blue Heron from a spring-fed pond.

In early January, Leslie Preston discovered 2 White-throated and 3 American Tree Sparrows among her feeder birds. A Red-tailed Hawk took advantage of the situation and made a meal out of one small bird. Elliott Adams, looking for northern winter species, instead found a female Cowbird and a male Rusty Blackbird (Sharon Springs). It’s intriguing that four Rusty Blackbirds, a species described as “on the brink” by Birdwatcher’s Digest, have been found in our area this winter! Elliott’s flightless Junco first found nearly 3 months ago is still around.

Angelika Rashkow enjoyed watching a variety of birds at her feeders during the cold snap, including Tree Sparrows.

She, too, has had a couple of hawks hanging around the feeders, hoping for an easy meal. In mid-January, a dozen hungry Cedar Waxwings foraged in her Crabapple trees. Leslie Preston found a dark-phase Rough-legged Hawk on Potato Farm Road (Morris). Dorian Huneke watched an immature Bald Eagle fly upstream past her barn in Treadwell. Her neighbors report that when they move bales of hay, the eagles are right there to grab the rats that are stirred up.

Mid-January: A large flock of Goldfinches and Pine Siskins moved into our yard in Oneonta, draining feeders that had been sitting for weeks without needing refilling.

Kathryn Davino described the amusing result of finches and other songbirds weathering the storms: ice-capped birds with DAs like “The Fonz” from Happy Days, and crests smoothed flat as if from Brill Cream. This harsh winter is unpleasant for us, but sure makes bird-watching more interesting!

Sandy Bright



Pine Siskin

Photo by Rick Bunting

Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch--2017 Season Wrap Up



Red-tailed Hawk

Photo by George Mikhail

The 2017 season came to an end at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch on January 7—somewhat later than the traditional New Year’s Day finale, due to the Himalaya-like conditions on the mountain for the previous couple of weeks.

The day was a balmy 10 C. with clear skies and a light SW wind. No birds were recorded.

This was the 29th consecutive year of counting at the site and was notable for the dearth of Red-tailed Hawks. Only 739 were tallied, the lowest total since the 1989 inaugural season which had only 54 hours of coverage. Red-tails were 59% below the 17-year average of 1809, since full time counting began at the site. There is some evidence that these buteos are wintering further north, and there has been a general decline in counts in recent years, but that

doesn’t explain the precipitous drop this season.

A relatively long-lived species, Red-tailed Hawk numbers do not change dramatically from year to year. Most other eastern fall hawk watch sites also experienced low numbers. Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania had its lowest count ever of red-tails in 82 years of observations!

On the up side, Franklin Mountain had its second consecutive 200+ Golden Eagle year, with 214 following last year’s 231. This count put Franklin Mountain at the head of the class among eastern hawk watches for goldens this season, only the second time the site has earned that distinction. The Golden Eagle flight got off to a slow start this year, disappointing counters and visitors alike. Only 14 birds were counted in October, and none for nearly the first week of November. A good flight of 21 did come on November 10, but the rest of the first half of the month only brought a trickle of the big raptors.

However, 18 Golden Eagles on November 17 started a stretch where **“Hawkwatch” Continued to page 6**

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

February

February 16 – DOAS Public Program, “Reptiles and Amphibians and Their Roles in Our Ecosystem”: Photographer, educator and DOAS Board Member Rod Sutton will present photographs and fascinating facts on reptiles and amphibians. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

February 16-19 – Great Backyard Bird Count. See article on page 3.

March

March 6 – DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 PM

March 16 – DOAS Public Program, “Climate Change in New York”: Dr. Kevin Schultz, Associate Professor of Physics at Hartwick College, will talk about climate change and its impact on the environment and our society.

The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

April

April 17– DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 PM

April 20 – DOAS Public Program, “Life at Sea Level”: Photographer Kyle Dudgeon will present a special collection of photographs and stories portraying the birds and wildlife found throughout the coastal regions of the Northeast. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

April 21 – DOAS Earth Festival Bird Walk: Led by Bob Donnelly. Carpools leave Milford Central School parking lot at 9AM.

April 21 – Earth Festival: Milford School, 11 AM -3PM. Visit the DOAS table! For full details about Earth Festival, visit <http://occainfo.org>.

“Hawkwatch” Continued from page 6

double-digit counts came on 5 of 6 dates, and the second half of November had 9 double-digit dates, with a high of 31 on November 27. The month ended with 186 goldens, the highest single month count in the history of the hawkwatch, topping 2005’s 167.

Although only a handful were counted, the other notable species at Franklin Mountain this season was Black Vulture. In the previous 28 years, only two BVs had been spotted. This year six were counted, perhaps the start of a long-overdue trend. It has always been a mystery why more of these easily IDed birds did not reach us, as they are present to the north, south and east in increasing numbers. There were also other Black Vulture reports from the Oneonta area this fall and several non-migrating birds reported at the hawk watch, so it appears that this species’ range

expansion is finally reaching the area.

Overall, the season total of 3860 raptors was 24% below the 17-year average, due in large part to the low red-tail count. However eleven species were below average with only Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle and Merlin showing increases.

All Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch data is available at www.hawkcount.org.

As usual, a dedicated group of volunteer counters put in long hours at the hawk watch this season. Thanks go to Andy Cooper, Larry Dake, Kyle Dudgeon, Pete Fauth, Fred Fries, Becky Gretton, Steve Hall, Marilyn Leahy, Andrea Lodovice, Randy Lynch, Andy Mason, Pam Peters and Tom Salo for their commitment to the hawkwatch.

Is your Membership Current?

Your mailing label will inform you of your membership expiration date (year and month, e.g. ‘1710 indicates October 2017). DOAS memberships are \$15 per year or \$25 for two years; family memberships are \$20 per year or \$30 for two years. **View membership benefits and download application from our website: doas.us/join-us/ OR join online at doas.us/store.**



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December-January 2018 Bird Sightings

It's amazing to see birds going about their business in winter, seemingly unaffected by the bitter cold. I dash out for scant minutes at a time, rushing to fill feeders and clean the bird bath, then rush back into the warmth to enjoy watching them.

In mid-December, Pine Siskins returned to Bob Donnelly's feeders in Cherry Valley. Kathy Dawson was happy to spot a Red-bellied Woodpecker, a first at her feeder, along with Hairy and Downy woodpeckers (Guilford). Susan Carver also had a first when she found a pair of Rusty Blackbirds at her feeder in Cobleskill.

Becky Gretton watched a crow harassing a Turkey Vulture

at the north end of Otsego Lake, then found the vulture perched on her neighbor's roof. A Cooper's Hawk caught its meal at Randy Lynch's feeder. While it fed, songbirds returned to the feeders, some only feet away from the fearsome predator.



Cooper's Hawk
by Pamela Kopen
Audubon Photo Award

Closer to the holidays, two hawks, probably Red-tails, harassed a Bald Eagle perched in a tree near Peter Clark's house. When it took off, Peter saw up close the amazing wingspan of these birds. On Christmas Day, Alice Pantaleoni found a couple dozen Snow Buntings foraging on South Hill (East Worcester). Elliott Adams had a half dozen Cowbirds in Sharon Springs. Gerianne Carillo added a White-throated Sparrow and a flock of Redpolls to the mix (Milford), and Steph Restuccia threw in a Red-winged Blackbird (Root).

At the end of the month, a Rusty Blackbird foraged below one of Tom Salo's feeders in West Burlington. He also has

Bird Sightings" Continued on page 6

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. We regret that not every report can be included due to limited space. Additional information may be requested for sightings of rare or unusual birds.