



Volume 50 Number 1  
January 2018

# THE BELTED KINGFISHER

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DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

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## COMING ACTIVITIES

### January

January 14– NYSOA Waterfowl Count

January 16–DOAS Board Mtg.

January 19– DOAS Program,  
“Designing Fruitful Forests”

January 20–DOAS Eagle Trip

### February

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

### March

March 6–DOAS Board Mtg.

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

**More information on page 7**

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



*Please join us  
for “Designing  
Fruitful Forests”*

*at 7:30 PM*

*at the Elm*

*Park Methodist Church, 401  
Chestnut Street in Oneonta, N.Y.*

*Refreshments will be served.*

## Designing Fruitful Forests

We often hear about the negative influences humans cause to forests. All too often the default management strategy is to do nothing and remain a mere spectator.

However, doing nothing is sometimes at the expense of a more fruitful forest. Instead, you too can be an integral

factor in the forest. Our ability to allocate sunlight at the right time and place can be used to make the forest literally more fruitful than it currently is. Some of the most fruitful forests today in New York State benefit from ancient human-derived legacies stretching back thousands of years; i.e. forest fire and its influence on blueberries, chestnuts, & acorns. Fewer fires often equal fewer blueberries. Although fire may not be an option for smaller landownerships today, there are other practices that can be followed.

Ryan Trapani (Executive Director, Catskill Forest

Association) and John MacNaught (Wildlife Specialist, Catskill Forest Association) will describe how you can make a small barren woodland into a more fruitful forest using

some basic tree identification and silvicultural practices using a chainsaw. Like the orchardist pruner who shapes the apple tree to improve

its structure and bear more fruit, the forester too can do the same across a forest. Ryan and John will show examples of how they have helped members of the Catskill Forest Association achieve a more fruitful forest for both humans and wildlife.

The Catskill Forest Association is a member-based, private non-profit, forestry education organization covering the six counties of the Catskill Mountains of New York State. The Catskill Forest Association serves its members through its programs and various forest-related events throughout the year.



## DOAS Conservation Efforts

by Co-president Andy Mason

Of all the activities our Audubon Chapter has been involved with since I have been a member, I am most proud of our conservation efforts. When I first joined in the early 1980s, Dr. John New was conservation chair. His columns on the major effort to protect Alaska's wilderness inspired me to write my first letters to elected officials. This hard-fought battle was successful in keeping large areas of the state's federal lands off limits to development and preserved for wildlife. (But the struggle continues—see this month's conservation news.)

We have continued the good fight on many fronts, local and beyond. With the era of global warming and climate change now upon us, we and other conservation groups have pushed for alternative energy—in the form of wind and solar power—and that is now bearing fruit. New York State has a goal of 50% of its electricity coming from renewable



Vermont Solar Farm by SayCheeeeeese

sources by 2030—and that is not pie in the sky. But as is often said, all forms of energy have impacts, and wind and solar are not without theirs.

DOAS just completed 20 days of surveying for raptors—focusing on

Bald and Golden Eagles—in the project area of a proposed 30-40 turbine wind farm in eastern Broome County. We know this is a migration corridor for these birds, and we want to be sure their presence is adequately documented. Fortunately, we received funding through New York State's new process for reviewing energy projects, and were able to pay counters to travel and spend 7 hours daily at a viewing site. The data has not yet been compiled, but we did record a significant number of eagles there. A report will be written up and provided to the project developer and to state and federal officials for use in making decisions on the wind farm. I want to thank DOAS member Stanley Salthe of Deposit for his help in gaining us the funding for this work.

We also have become aware of a large-scale solar project planned for an area in the Mohawk Valley where we have participated in the Fort Plain Christmas Count, and also led field trips. Much of this area is suitable habitat for grassland birds—a declining group—and species such as Short-eared Owls, Northern Harriers, Upland Sandpipers, Bobolinks and a variety of sparrows are found there.

This project would affect 1000 acres of land, and could have significant impacts on these  
**"Andy's Column" Continued to page 3**



Bald Eagle  
photo by Rick Bunting

### THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Janet Potter

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## Conservation and Legislation

### Has John Faso been turned

**around?**—Last month we wrote about local US Representative John Faso voting to support opening the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil and gas exploration and production, in order to provide revenue to offset costs from the pending tax bill. Since then, Rep. Faso has received many comments from conservationists and environmental organizations—including DOAS—opposing his stance.

In late November, Faso announced he was signing on to a letter along with other House Representatives opposing inclusion of ANWR drilling in the tax bill. This is obviously a positive development, but does not guarantee that he will vote against a final tax bill that contains ANWR drilling. However, it does show he is aware of the issue and that it is of concern to constituents. It also shows that letters, phone calls and emails can make a difference.

**What you can do**—Let Representative Faso know that you appreciate his signing on to this letter and urge him to continue to support protection of what is perhaps America's greatest wildlife area.

**Trump administration reverses ban on pesticide lethal to birds**—The string of rollbacks of environmental protections by the Trump administration continues unabated. The Environmental Protection



Willow Ptarmigan, Alaska--USFWS

Agency was on course to ban the dangerous pesticide chlorpyrifos until EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt came on the job. He promptly extended the chemical's registration for another five years—reversing the recommendation of the agency's own scientists.

Chlorpyrifos is a neurotoxic pesticide that has been known to kill birds for a half-century. Related to sarin nerve gas, it is used on food crops where birds are exposed. The EPA has said that chlorpyrifos is likely to adversely affect 97 percent of all endangered wildlife, including more than 100 bird species listed under the Endangered Species Act.

In addition to this threat to wildlife, the chemical affects children and farmworkers, and is found in numerous foods including strawberries, wheat and apples. Chlorpyrifos also turns up in drinking water in areas where it is used.

**What you can do**—There is no place for this neurotoxin in the environment or in our nation's food supply. Given the EPA's failure to act, it is up to Congress to address this serious issue. Contact US Senators Gillibrand and Schumer, and your congressional Representative, and ask them to work to ban chlorpyrifos.

*(Contact information for elected officials is available on the conservation page of the DOAS web site, [www.doas.us](http://www.doas.us).)*

by Andy Mason

**"Andy's Column" Continued from page 2** grassland species. We will monitor this plan and likely comment on it once it is more clearly defined with specific locations.

We consider it important to monitor these large energy infrastructure projects in and near our Chapter area, regardless of whether they are gas, oil, wind, solar, biomass, or some new technology. We appreciate the support and assistance of our members in these efforts. Birds and other wildlife have no voice in these decisions, so we and others need to stand up for these creatures we consider important.

### Mark Your Calendar

On Friday, February 16th, DOAS Director Rod Sutton will be presenting **"Reptiles and Amphibians and Their Roles in Our Ecosystem,"** featuring many wonderful photographs. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.



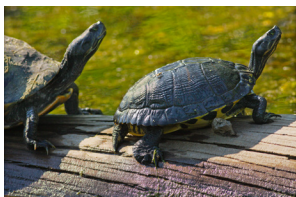
## Photographing Snakes, a Lifelong Fascination

By DOAS Director Rod Sutton

I've been asked many times why do I photograph snakes? I actually photograph many aspects of life and nature. It is impossible for me to be interested in Reptiles and Amphibians, or herps as they are referred to (Herpetology is the study of reptiles and amphibians) without developing an interest in the Flora and Fauna of our planet, it all fits.

My interest in reptiles started as a child when I was given a book on dinosaurs. The common wisdom of the time was that reptiles evolved from dinosaurs. It seemed to make sense, as there was a picture of a collared lizard included in the book. At about the same time, I found a snake outdoors and took it in to share with family members. That was when I found out my grandmother was afflicted with ophidiophobia, a fear of snakes. My fascination with reptiles has continued throughout my life. Other creatures fascinated me as well.

My first career was in media production, specifically photography and video production. It was a natural fit for my interest in reptiles and other animals. I grew up watching Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom and wanted experiences similar to what I saw on that show. I first started photographing snakes and lizards. I read books by Carl Kauffeld, Director and Curator of Reptiles at the Staten Island Zoo, and Clifford Pope. I traveled to the Staten Island Zoo, which had the world's only complete collection of rattlesnakes. I met Carl Alimonti who worked at the zoo as reptile keeper and is mentioned in Kauffeld's book "Keeper and the Kept." I later acquired a Yellow Phase Reticulated Python from him.



**Yellow Bellied Sliders**

I know of animal behavior, the equipment I'm using and where I need to be. Favorite locations include the southwest United States, the Catskills, the Adirondack and Appalachian Mountains, the Everglades and one of my favorites, the Alligator River Nature Preserve in North Carolina.



**Red Diamond Rattlesnake**

I photograph animals in a studio and in the wild. In the studio, I have control of the animal (such as spotted salamanders, one of my favorites). In the field, the only control I have is what

the equipment I'm using and where

In the Alligator River Nature Preserve, you find the northernmost range of the American Alligator, the largest population of black bears east of the Mississippi and the only wild population of Red Wolves in the world. It is also home to an incredible number of turtles and water snakes, including Cottonmouth Water

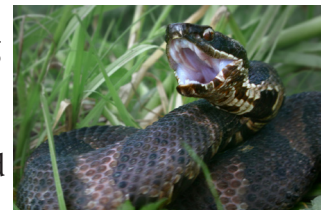
Moccasins. The preserve offers opportuni-

ties for hiking and kayaking, as well as providing miles of dirt roads for viewing wildlife. It is located between Roanoke Island and mainland North Carolina, and is part of the Atlantic coastal plain. It is referred to as a pocosin, which is designation for low swampy ground, especially a wooded swamp. Part of the preserve is devoted to agriculture and acres of fields are dedicated to that purpose. When the crops raised in the area are harvested, 20 percent of the crops remain for wildlife. The fields are flooded twice annually coinciding with migratory bird migrations, providing food and protected rest areas for the birds.

I use all types of equipment appropriate to what I'm hoping to find, primarily Canon and Nikon cameras, both film and digital, a variety of medium and large format and lenses ranging from 14mm to 800mm. I learn everything I can about the animal I'm looking for, both for the animal's wellbeing, as well as my own. I have photographed cobras and rattlesnakes in their infamous threat displays, White Rhinos, mambas, African lions, Hippos, Nile crocodiles to name a few. The only time I've been attacked by a wild animal was an encounter with a North American Goshawk that chased me and landed on my head while digging in its talons. I didn't know anything about Goshawks until that memorable day.



**Black Bear**



**Water Moccasin**

Note: All photos by Rod Sutton

## Golden Eagles Aplenty!

The Golden Eagle season got off to a slow start this year at the Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch, 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 Golden Eagles 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 double-digit counts came on 5 of 6 dates, and as of this writing, the second half of November has had 8 double-digit dates, with a high of 31 on November 27. The month ended with 186 Golden Eagles, the highest single month count in the history of the hawkwatch, topping 2005's 167. Through the third week of December, the season total stood at 212, above the average for the site.

Counts taper off in December, but Franklin Mt. has had 10 double-digit days in the month, so the potential is always there.

On the down side, Red-tailed Hawk numbers are dramatically low this fall. Only 736 had been counted well into December, past the peak for the species. It is quite possible the season total will not reach 1000, something that has never happened since full-time counting began 17 years ago. The season average for Red-tails over that period is 1875, and we may get less than half of that number.

Red-tailed Hawks are down at many hawk watch sites this fall. There is some indication that the birds are wintering further north, but that does not explain this extraordinary drop in 2017.

We will provide a full season wrap-up in the next Belted Kingfisher.



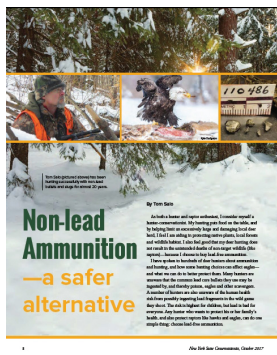
Immature Golden Eagle at the Hawkwatch, Photo by Kyle Dudgeon

## Glimmerglass Film Days Bird Walk

On Saturday, November 11, a chilly but sunny day, DOAS hosted a bird walk behind the Fenimore Museum with guides Charlie Scheim and Becky Gretton. Waterfowl were plentiful on the lake, including Canada Geese, Hooded and Common Mergansers, and a very active Pied-billed Grebe. An adult Bald Eagle at the top of a tall conifer kept watch over the lake the entire time. Thanks to our participants for joining us! This has become a regular event and we look forward to reuniting and to meeting new friends next year.



Photo by Charlie Scheim



## Non-lead Ammo Article by Tom Salo in the NYS Conservationist Magazine

DOAS Director Tom Salo authored an article on alternatives to lead ammunition in the October issue of the *NYS Conservationist*, a publication of the Department of Environmental Conservation. Tom has been a leader in promoting a switch to non-lead ammo, due to the threat posed to eagles and other scavengers from lead poisoning.

The article is available online at [http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration\\_pdf/1017consmag4web.pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration_pdf/1017consmag4web.pdf).

**“Bird Sightings” Continued from page 8** back at her feeders in Delhi. While doing some yard work, a Ruffed Grouse didn’t seem to notice her, and she got some great close views until a crow gave her away.

Randy Lynch found a mix of late-summer and winter birds - a Golden-crowned Kinglet and a late season Common Grackle in Jefferson, an American Kestrel near Hobart, and 4 Snow Buntings in Harpersfield. Near Ames, a Cattle Egret was reported by Tom Williams, and a light morph Rough-legged Hawk by Elliot Adams.

In the waning days of November, a half-dozen Pine Siskins made their way to Bob Donnelly’s feeders (Cherry Valley). Barb Palmer still had a pair of Mallards and a Kingfisher working her ponds in Jefferson. A Catbird had been present until mid-November. Charlie Scheim discovered a Great Blue Heron in a pond at New Island (Oneonta). Walking in Glimmerglass State Park, Becky Gretton found an immature Snow Goose keeping company with lots of Canada Geese. As she watched, an adult Bald Eagle “flew into the usual perching tree, the branch broke, and off it flew.”

For a couple of years now, Joseph Happle has enjoyed watching a pair of Bald Eagles at what is apparently a favored perch for fishing the river in Otego. Also in the area were a half dozen or so Common Mergansers.

In early December, Elliott Adams reported that a flightless Junco had been hanging around his feeder and taking shelter in his garage in Sharon Springs for about a month. Steph Restuccia found a flock of about 10 Snow Buntings in Root.

In mid-December, Charlie Scheim and I headed to Laurens to look for a Snowy Owl reported by Rick Brockway in the *Daily Star*. We found it, along with a Sharp-shinned Hawk, which dove at the owl but was warned off by scolding calls, and two dark-morph Rough-legged Hawks.



Snowy Owl in Laurens

As the deadline for the article looms, the forecast calls for cold weather and some snow. Hopefully that will bring birds back to the feeders in time for the Christmas Bird Counts!

Sandy Bright

## Saw-whet Owl Banding with Rick Bunting

Rick Bunting, our November program speaker whose photography is enjoyed by the hundreds on his email list, recently reported on several outings to band Saw-whet owls. Here is how he describes the process: “Saw-whet Owls are the smallest owl we have in the northeast and the only one that migrates. Over the past twenty-five or so years a network of licensed banders (Project OwlNet) from Canada to Alabama has been created to try and ascertain the details of that migration. The data continue to grow every year about when and how these wonderful birds establish their southerly routes. As with all bird banding, the more we know about the migration process the better we will be at becoming stewards of critical environmental elements that support the species. When an owl responds to the caller and is captured in a mist net it is taken to the banding station and a thorough process of recording the critical



Photo by Rick Bunting

data begins. First the bird is banded...This step requires managing talons that, although small, can easily create some damage!

One of the many statistics recorded is the weight of the bird. This is an indicator of both the health and the sex. This is done by carefully placing the bird in a tube and putting it on a calibrated scale.”

Rick described this Saw-whet Owl caught in early November as a beauty with “eyes that could kill”! Research revealed that the bird was banded in Duluth, Minnesota in September of 2016. He says, “We have grown accustomed to reading about the incredibly long migration flights of birds but for a Saw-whet Owl this is a long-distance flight.” One OwlNet ornithologist proposed a reason we humans are attracted to owls—unlike many other birds, their eyes are in the front of their head so we literally look them in the eye.



# UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

## January

### January 14– NY State Ornithological Association

**Waterfowl Count:** DOAS covers Otsego Lake and the Susquehanna River above Unadilla, the Unadilla River, and Cannonsville Reservoir and the West Branch of the Delaware River. This effort involves surveying waterways where they can be seen, and identifying and counting ducks and geese. The totals are used by the Department of Environmental Conservation in managing these species over the upcoming year. Anyone interested in helping with the census, please contact Andy Mason, (607) 652-2162, [AndyMason@earthling.net](mailto:AndyMason@earthling.net).

### January 16 – DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 PM

**January 19 – DOAS Public Program, “Designing Fruitful Forests”:** The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. **See article on page 1.**

**January 20– DOAS Eagle Trip:** Field trip to view wintering Bald Eagles around the Delaware County rivers and reservoirs. Eagles concentrate around open water in the region to feed, and recent trips have turned up 20+ birds, including 30 last year. Other raptors and waterfowl are usually sighted also. We will stop at a local restaurant for lunch for interested participants. The trip will leave

the Dietz Street parking lot across from the YMCA in Oneonta at 7:30 AM. Carpooling is strongly encouraged, and participants can be picked up en route in Delhi and Walton. Return to Oneonta will be mid to late afternoon. For further information, contact Andy Mason, (607) 652-2162, [AndyMason@earthling.net](mailto:AndyMason@earthling.net).

## 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.

## 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.

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## October-December 2017 Bird Sightings

Where have all the birds gone? Long time, passerine...

Many have noted and asked about the dearth of birds this fall. Feeders that normally need replenishing every few days instead hang neglected and little-used. Natural food has been plentiful, so birds have been less dependent on feeders. As a result, reports of bird sightings trickled in slowly this fall. But that didn't mean there weren't some interesting finds!

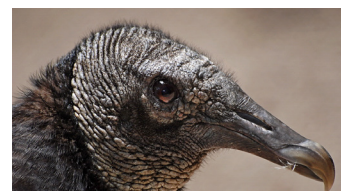
This reporting period began with a very unusual sighting; a Wood Stork found at a pond in East Meredith in early October! Doug Amadon found this bird, likely a young bird blown off course - way, way off course! - by the

southern storms. He snapped some good photos before the stork disappeared, hopefully on its way to warmer waters.

In late October, Andy Cooper spotted two Black Vultures over Glenwood Cemetery in Oneonta. I found an Eastern Towhee calling near the lower level of Wilber Park, and a White-throated Sparrow near the high school (Oneonta).

In early November, Pam Peters was happy to find ducks returning to the waterways: a pair of Hooded Mergansers, 8 Common Mergansers, 3 Wood Ducks and a bunch of Mallards near Treadwell. Becky Gretton and Kyle Dudgeon discovered 7 Northern Harriers and about that many Short-eared Owls on Dingman Road (Montgomery County), along with Great-horned and Barred Owls.

By mid-November, Kathryn Davino was glad to finally have Chickadees, Juncos, Mourning Doves, and Blue Jay  
**Bird Sightings" Continued on page 6**



**Black Vulture**  
by Lorenzo Cassina  
**Audubon Photo Award**

***If you have bird sightings to report, contact Sandy Bright, [brights@hartwick.edu](mailto: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.***