



Volume 50 Number 5 May  
2018

# THE BELTED KINGFISHER

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DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

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## COMING ACTIVITIES

### June

June 3–Birding by Ear

### July-August

July-August–John New Summer Day  
Camp

### August

August 21–DOAS Board Mtg.

### September

September–DOAS Bird Seed Sale

September 18–DOAS Board Mtg.

September 21–DOAS Program TBA

### October

October 6–DOAS Open House

October 12 –DOAS Charter Dinner

**More information on page 7**

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

## 2018 The Year of the Bird: Why Do Birds Matter?



Indigo Bunting  
Sunil Gopalan  
Audubon Award Photo

In 2018, we mark the centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the most powerful and important bird-protection law ever passed. In honor of this milestone, nature lovers around the world, led by National Audubon Society, BirdLife International, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Geographic, have declared 2018 the *Year of the Bird*. To celebrate, we are printing a few answers from authors and naturalists, and our own DOAS leaders, to the question, “Why do birds matter?” We hope you will consider your own answer to this important question as you read this.

**David Sibley**, Author and Ornithologist— Birds make any place a chance for discovery, they make a garden seem wild, they are a little bit of wilderness coming into a city park, and for a bird watcher every walk is filled with anticipation. What feathered jewel might drop out of the sky next?

**Barbara Kingsolver**, Author— Why do birds matter? It’s a funny question. Imagine asking a cardinal, “Why do humans matter?” He would sing if he could, from the top of a telephone pole, “They don’t! Not at all! Look at me!” Every species basically thinks we’re the real one, and all others are food or set decoration. If you could step back and register all our noise at once, you might get a glimpse of the real deal: life on earth.

**Becky Gretton**, DOAS Co-president— Birds are important because of the role they play in the natural world as pollinators and seed dispersers, assisting with the balance of nature by eating insects. They also clean up things that would go unattended otherwise.

Birds are important TO ME because of the kinship that I feel with another living species, and the joy that they bring to me year around. Encountering spring migrants feels brand new every time! I feel responsibility for their well-being and take care not to disturb their nesting with unnecessary sounds, disturbance or habitat destruction. I respect the incredible work they do to bring about future generations.

**Jonathan Franzen**, National Book Award winning novelist—When someone asks me why birds are so important to me, all I can do is sigh and shake my head, as if I’ve been asked to

**“Birds Matter” Continued on page 6**

## A Note of Thanks to All Who Joined Us

by Co-President Becky Gretton

Our DOAS program year seems to stretch from September to June, with July and August setting us up for another “season”, with a huge variety of other key events offered to everyone.

We have been happily overwhelmed by our member and public attendance at these events. Had you all not taken the time and made the journey to the Elm Park Methodist Church and other venues, our efforts would have been for nought.

In September our Bird Seed Sale began, and it was incredibly supported once again, topping past sales totals. Michael Clarke of the DEC skillfully brought awareness of coyotes to a full house at the September program, sparking interest in coyote behavior.

The DOAS Sanctuary Open House on Oct. 5 was filled with interested bird lovers, and the FMHW was well under way, with the first Golden Eagle of the season spotted on October 16. Our much-anticipated 50th Anniversary Charter Dinner was extremely fun, delicious, and also wonderfully attended, with speaker Joan Collins bringing boreal

birds to life at the Holiday Inn!

Favorite photographer and storyteller Rick Bunting took us to “his” beloved Great Blue Heron rookery

through his photographs in November, bringing back summer for a while.

As holiday shopping approached, we were encouraged to shop our local wildlife artists Doug Jamieson, Dave Kiehm, Rod Spangle and Kyle Dudgeon.

In January, Catskill Forest Association’s Ryan Trapani and John McNaught brought us unique insights regarding shaping forests to benefit humans and wildlife. I was pleased to learn that they responded to a request by an Oneonta family to preserve apple trees that held deep historical meaning for that family.

February found us in the midst of Reptiles and Amphibians with board member Rod Sutton’s incredible photography and vast knowledge engaging everyone (lots!) who came to listen and learn.

Dr. Kevin Schultz from Hartwick College addressed Climate Change in March with clear, common sense whys and hows, and daily choices offered to each of us in order to make a difference locally.

In April, SUCO student Kyle Dudgeon further contributed to



Great Blue Heron  
by Rick Bunting



Kyle Dudgeon presenting “Life at Sea Level” in April

### THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

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To contribute notes or articles for  
The Belted Kingfisher, email:  
[editor@doas.us](mailto:editor@doas.us)

“Thanks” Continued on page 3

## Conservation and Legislation

### US Supreme Court refuses to hear Constitution pipeline appeal

—In the latest legal setback for the proposed Constitution Pipeline, the US Supreme Court has declined to hear an appeal from the project sponsors of NY State's denial of a water quality permit for the state. The pipeline, which would carry fracked natural gas from Pennsylvania to Schoharie County in NY, has now been rejected at state and national levels. A brief synopsis:

- In late 2014, several environmental organizations, including DOAS, brought legal action against the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) opposing the agency's approval of the project.
- In April 2016, the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation denied a necessary permit for pipeline crossings of streams and wetlands under the Clean Water Act. Constitution sued the state over this decision and lost in two separate cases.
- Earlier this year the company appealed to FERC to override the state's permit denial and was rejected.
- Constitution asked the Supreme Court to hear the case, which ended with the latest refusal.

Constitution is still proceeding with an effort to have FERC rehear its request to override the permit denial, but this is considered unlikely.

### DOAS completes raptor surveys in wind project area

—Our organization has been involved in another energy-related project in the region. DOAS received intervenor funding from the NY State Department of Public Service to survey migrating raptors in the proposed Bluestone Wind project area in eastern Broome County. We have been concerned about this wind farm because it would be on the migratory routes for Bald and Golden Eagles.

Fall surveys took place in late October through November 2017, and the spring surveys were completed in March of this year. While the fall observations were in line with what was expected, the spring survey found high numbers of resident Bald and Golden Eagles, in addition to migrating birds.

Our results have been sent to the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation and the US Fish & Wildlife Service, as well as the wind company, and are now part of the record the Public Service Commission will consider when deciding whether to permit the project.

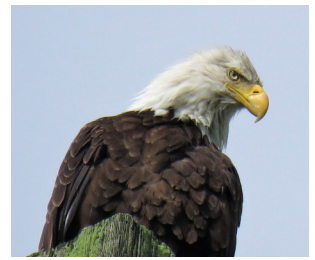
The reports for both fall and spring surveys can be found at [www.tinyurl.com/doasbluestone1](http://www.tinyurl.com/doasbluestone1).

**Homework for the summer**—Since this is the last newsletter until September, here is your one assignment for the summer: contact your federal lawmakers and ask them to stand up against the Trump administration's weakening of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This is the nation's primary statute protecting songbirds, raptors, wading birds and other species, and is a legacy of the early Audubon movement.

The Interior Department is redefining the rules for violations of the Act, putting birds at risk from oil pits, wind turbines, commercial fishing nets and other threats. See the May Belted Kingfisher for more details. Additional information is available at the National Audubon web site ([audubon.org](http://audubon.org)) and the American Bird Conservancy ([abcbirds.org](http://abcbirds.org)).

*(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



Bald Eagle  
Rick Bunting Photo

### "Thanks" Continued from page 3

DOAS through his photography as he shared "Life at Sea Level", relating his experience with shore birds and passion for the environment. We enjoyed a fine group of college students in the audience as well! Once again we needed more chairs, a VERY good thing.

As I write this article, Tannar Cliffe's program on Monarchs and Milkweed is four days away. I hope you

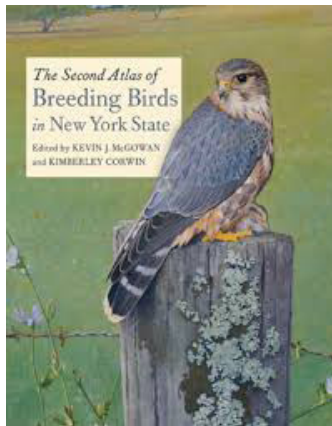
were able to enjoy it, too.

In conclusion, your support of DOAS through attendance at field trips, programs, and our many other events, as well as your continued membership keeps us energized, with our goal of conservation, education, research, and advocacy being the biggest beneficiary. Thank you, everyone! See you in September.



## New York State Breeding Bird Atlas by DOAS Director Charlie Scheim

Besides majoring in mathematics when I was in college in the early 1970s, I dabbled in a number of other subjects. Among other things, I fancied myself a naturalist, and I was quite taken with the writings of Thoreau; in particular his book *Walden*, documenting the two years he spent living alone in a cabin that he built in the woods by Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts. In addition to his philosophizing about society and politics (as in *Civil Disobedience*) and advocating the values of living a simple life, Thoreau was very much a scientist. Among his scientific observations regarding the Walden woods, he carefully recorded the many plants and animals that inhabited that space along with him. I wanted to replicate in my own small way such a project, and so I resolved to catalog all the plants and animals that could be found in a small meadow that I liked to frequent near my college. I spent hours over many days over quite a few months, visiting the meadow in every season, learning to identify the plants, birds, amphibians, and insects I could find there. Getting to know an area so intimately was a wonderfully appealing experience for me.



A similar sort of opportunity will soon be available to us birders. The *New York State Breeding Bird Atlas* (BBA), because of its design, offers the possibility of developing a very intimate knowledge of the birds in an area.

The BBA is a state-wide volunteer effort (under the aegis of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation) to document the birds that breed in New York. It occurs every twenty years and lasts for five years. New York's first BBA was 1980-1985; a second ran in 2000-2005. A third is coming up soon, for 2020-2025. The entire state is divided into 5332 blocks, each of which is a 5km x 5km square. In 2000-2005, 1200 volunteers covered these blocks. (My first block had the romantic name 4971C, though I preferred to call it the "Milford State Forest block".) Volunteers bird their blocks, usually returning to a block several or

even many times, perhaps over a few years, looking for evidence of breeding behavior. Birds observed are marked as "Possible", "Probable", or "Confirmed" breeders. For example, if during a first visit to an area in a block during breeding season, Yellow Warblers are seen or heard, they are marked as "Possible"; if on returning to that area Yellow Warblers are again observed, they are marked as "Probable" breeders in the block. Or, if you observe a male/female pair in suitable habitat in breeding season, then Yellow Warblers are immediately marked as "Probable". If birds are observed carrying food or giving a distraction display, or if you observe fledged young, the species is considered "Confirmed" breeders in the block. (For a full list of various behaviors, google "NY Breeding Bird Atlas Breeding Codes".)

Returning to an area repeatedly, observing on an ever deeper level, affords a wonderful opportunity to learn more and more about our local birds. While doing the BBA, I learned many bird songs and sounds, and I learned about behaviors that I never knew existed. I observed males courting females with food offerings and saw adults leaving nests with fecal sacs from their unfledged young. I learned to distinguish the chips between feeding Song Sparrow pairs from those between feeding Yellowthroat pairs. I saw Redstart females carrying and weaving fibers as they built their nest and watched Chickadees chipping out nest holes in hollow tree trunks.

We all have favorite places to bird, that we return to over and over; by volunteering for the BBA, you can contribute to this scientific work while you enjoy your favorite haunts. There are no time schedules to constrain your efforts or specific routes to follow. Instead, there is the opportunity to observe and enjoy our avian friends in all their habits and habitats while becoming part of a larger community of citizen scientists.

**Election Report** The DOAS nominating committee presented five candidates for election at the May 18th meeting. The membership elected Jane Bachman, running for the first time, and the following incumbents: Becky Gretton, Andy Mason, Dorian Huneke, Charlie Scheim, and Tom Salo. Terms for all candidates are two years ending in May of 2020.

## May Field Trip Highlights and Big Day Report

**Saturday May 5**—Charlie Schiem and Sandy Bright led over a dozen participants on a bird walk at the Susquehanna Greenway in Oneonta. Sandy reported that the trees have never been so bare for this early May walk. One might think that would make birds easier to spot.

Unfortunately, it seemed to make them more wary. Participants did get great looks at some birds, though, including several species of waterfowl and raptors, many warblers (a nice view of a Nashville Warbler), and lots of colorful woodland species (for example, Baltimore Oriole, Purple Finch, and Goldfinch). Combined with good company and nice sunny weather, it was a very pleasant, successful outing.

### **Saturday May 5— 2018 Global Big Day Report—**

Global Big Day is an event sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology that invites everyone from around the world to look for birds on the same day and submit their observations to eBird. DOAS participated in this year's Global Big Day, held on Saturday, May 5th, Bob Donnelly coordinating. He reports that the early date this year was reflected in fewer numbers and species of warblers and vireos being found. Also, the weather in the morning was cold, limiting singing. There was only one report of a red-eyed vireo. Still, the various groups totaled 97 species. Randy and Carol Lynch had the most unusual species, with an Olive-sided Flycatcher back very early. They also reported Ring-necked ducks and gnatcatchers. They also had the most species, with 85. Thanks to all who participated and sent in results.

**Saturday May 13**—Charlie and Sandy led another bird walk, this time at the West Branch Preserve near



Greenway Walk, May 5th

Hamden. Two hardy souls showed up for the wet, cool walk at the West Branch preserve in Hamden. Despite the weather, they had some nice sightings, and tallied 28 species. Though the forest seemed nearly devoid of birds, many of the usual field birds were present. Towhees were ubiquitous throughout the

meadow. They got great views of several, including some with tails fanned out, and interesting interactions between individuals. The song of a Yellow-throated Vireo greeted them at the entrance as they arrived, and bid them adieu as they departed.

**Sunday May 14**—Led by Andy Mason, six birders turned out for a bird walk at the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society's wildlife sanctuary. There were remnants of a foggy morning on the mountain as the group traversed the trails. Several pairs of Canada Geese were dominant in the wetland, often drowning out other bird songs. But Baltimore Orioles, Red-winged Blackbirds, Swamp Sparrows, Northern Waterthrushes and Goldfinches could also be seen and heard. A number of warbler species were found in the woods, including Yellow-rumped, Yellow, Blackburnian, Common Yellowthroat and American Redstart. Wood Thrushes and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were also present as was a drumming Ruffed Grouse. A showy male Scarlet Tanager appeared at the edge of the woods, providing a good view to all. The last bird of the morning, appropriately enough, was a Broad-winged Hawk soaring over the Hawkwatch.



### **Climate Action - Native Plants for Birds Project**

Over the past few months, we have been working on a collaborative pilot program with Audubon New

York and SUNY Oneonta's Environmental Sustainability Club. The project will promote landscaping with area

native plants, recommend plant species, gather directory information for native plant nurseries in the area, and coordinate a native plant sale in September. COMMUNITY SUPPORT IS NEEDED! If you are interested in helping out with this project, please contact Susan O'Handley at [sjohandley@gmail.com](mailto:sjohandley@gmail.com) or by phone at 607-643-5680. Summer meetings will be coordinated and conducted 'virtually', online.

**“Bird Sightings” Continued from page 8**

into Dorian Huneke’s barn in Treadwell (5/1).

May 2nd marked the arrival of the first Catbird, spotted by Leslie Preston in Oneonta, and a House Wren, which chattered on a stone wall as Pam Peters arrived home. Pam, along with Kathy Mario, also found Winter Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Black-throated Green Warbler, Ovenbird, and Yellow-throated Warbler along the Andes Rail Trail.

May 3rd: Continuing her streak of firsts, Pam spotted Prairie Warbler in Franklin, and Wood Thrush and Least Flycatcher in Treadwell. Bonnie Seegmiller reported the first Ruby-throated Hummingbird (Downsville). Rose-breasted Grosbeaks appeared in Milford (Geriann Carillo) and Delhi (Kathryn Davino). Kyle Dudgeon picked up Blue-winged and Black-and-white Warblers at Riddell State Park, then Black-throated Green Warblers at the SUCO College Camp, along with the nice surprise of a Sandhill Crane flyover. Spotted Sandpipers called at the Greenway Trail in Oneonta.

May 4th: Baltimore Orioles showed up in West Burlington (Tom Salo), Jefferson (Barb Palmer) and Kortright (Gerry Pearlburg). Gerry also reported Cedar Waxwings, American Redstarts, and the first Bobolink chortling merrily by her pond. A White-crowned Sparrow arrived in our yard and stayed for several days, attracting a mate while there.

May 5th, the Big Day count: Nashville Warblers,

Chimney Swifts, Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Yellow-throated Vireo, and a lone Veery arrived in Oneonta. A transitional plumage male Indigo Bunting visited Elliott Adams’ feeder (Sharon

Springs). May 6th, Blackburnian Warblers were heard singing in Wilber Park, upper trails.

May 10th: A male Red-headed Woodpecker foraged in willows at a creek in Treadwell (Dorian Huneke). Mourning Warblers and Great-crested Flycatchers were found near Laurens (Charlie Scheim). May 12th: Chestnut-sided Warblers were heard near Hamden, and the last report of Pine Siskins came in (Jean Petterson, Walton). Charlie Scheim spotted fluffy yellow goslings by a pond on Franklin Mountain. Randy and Carol Lynch found Bay-breasted Warbler, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and Ring-necked Duck near Harpersfield. Bird-watchers at the Audubon Sanctuary were treated to good views of a Scarlet Tanager and the song of a Northern Waterthrush (Andy Mason, 4/13). The last new species to arrive during this reporting period was a Red-eyed Vireo in Treadwell (Pam Peters, 5/14).

Sandy Bright



**Indigo Bunting**  
Photo by Rick Bunting

**“Birds Matter” Continued from page 1**

explain why I love my brothers. And yet the question is a fair one, worth considering in the centennial year of America’s Migratory Bird Treaty Act: Why do birds matter? My answer might begin with the vast scale of the avian domain. ...Things with feathers can be found in every corner of every ocean and in land habitats so bleak that they’re habitats for nothing else. ...To survive in so many different habitats, the world’s 10,000 or so bird species have evolved into a spectacular diversity of forms. They range in size from the nine-foot tall Ostrich...to the aptly named Bee Hummingbird. Some birds...are gaudier than any flower. Others come in one of the nearly infinite shades of brown that tax the vocabulary of avian taxonomists: rufous, fulvous, ferruginous, bran-colored, foxy. Note—Franzen’s full answer appears in the January 2018 issue of *National Geographic* magazine.

**Andy Mason**, DOAS Co-president—Birds have always been an early warning system for our environment--the “canary in the coal mine.” It was the decline in bird species high on the food chain that tipped us off to the dangers of DDT and other chemicals. More recently, high altitude and high latitude birds are demonstrating the first definitive effects of climate change. If science had been more advanced in the 1800s, the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon could have served as a warning about habitat destruction. This not just about protecting the birds--although that is a worthy goal--but all of these threats will ultimately reach the human race.



# UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

## June

**June 3 – Birding by Ear:** This event is SOLD OUT.

## July–August

**July–August – John New Summer Day Camp:** See dates and registration information below. Held at the DOAS Franklin Mountain Sanctuary.

## August

**August 21– DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 PM.

## September

**September 1– Watch for details of the DOAS**

## Bird Seed Sale.

**September 18– DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 PM.

**September 21– DOAS Program:** Topic to be announced in September newsletter. The program will begin at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut St., Oneonta.

## October

**October 6– DOAS Open House:** DOAS Sanctuary.

**October 12– DOAS Charter Dinner:** Holiday Inn, Oneonta.



## Space is Limited - Register Today

July 16-19 at DOAS Sanctuary - 9:30am-3pm

(for children entering 3rd/4th grades)

July 30-Aug 2 at DOAS Sanctuary - 9:30am-3pm

(for children entering 5th/6th grades)

August 20-24 - SPECIAL SESSION at Audubon at OWL  
(Oneonta World of Learning)

9:30am-noon (for children entering 1st/2nd grades)

Questions: *Email Susan at [sjohandley@gmail.com](mailto:sjohandley@gmail.com).*

Register online at [www.doas.us](http://www.doas.us).

**Support our Sponsors! Thank you to Rod Spangle Antiques in Unadilla for being a sponsor!**



## Is your Membership Current?

Your mailing label will inform you of your membership expiration date (year and month, e.g. '1810 indicates October 2018). 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/](http://doas.us/join-us/) OR join online at [doas.us/store](http://doas.us/store).**



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## April-May Bird Sightings

In early May, many migrants arrive, thrilling us with their bright colors and varied songs. This month's report is devoted to the first sightings of these, with homage paid also to last sightings of our winter visitors.

A Broad-winged Hawk vocalized as it flew over Andy Mason's house in Jefferson (4/22). On the 23rd, Bob Donnelly discovered Blue-headed Vireo, Field Sparrows, Ospreys and a Pheasant in Roseboom. Pam Peters found a Solitary Sandpiper feeding in a muddy pond (Franklin 4/26). On Otsego Lake, Becky Gretton got a long look at a Horned Grebe, and reported more Common Loons than usual, which unsurprisingly became agitated when an eagle flew over. (4/26).

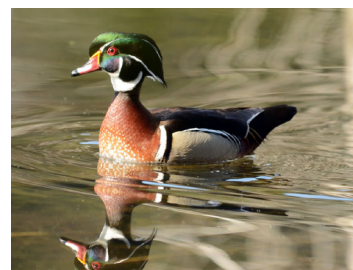
**To keep up with the latest sightings or report your own, subscribe to OS Birds at [YahooGroups.com](http://YahooGroups.com). Sightings can also be reported to Sandy Bright, [brights@hartwick.edu](mailto:brights@hartwick.edu), at 40 Fair St., Oneonta, NY 13820, or at (607) 287-4465. Due to limited space, not all reports can be included in this article..**

Bob Plath commented on species rarely if ever visiting his yard before, including Fox and White-throated Sparrows, Eastern Towhees, and Brown Thrashers (4/27).

Alice Pantaleoni reported that Wood Ducks had laid their first egg in Worcester. Pam Peters observed Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Barred Owls in Franklin. Dave Kiehlm watched a Hermit Thrush pulling worms in his yard in Milford. Andy Mason discovered a very bright Yellow-rumped Warbler in the snow in Stamford. Angelika Rashkow saw a pair of House Finches on the branches of her lilacs.

Betsy O'Brien got a good look at a Green Heron on a stump lot (Milford Center, 4/28). Gerry Pearlburg found a goose nesting on a pond (Kortright). Becky Gretton was treated to the song of a Louisiana Waterthrush in Richfield Springs (4/30). Barn Swallows came swooping

**Bird Sightings" Continued on page 6**



**Wood Duck**  
**Photo by David Kiehlm**